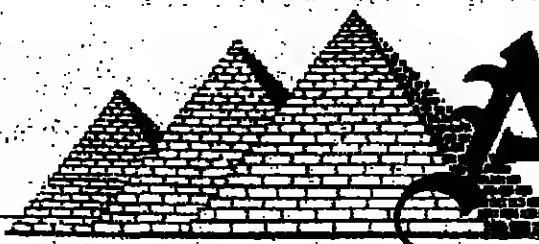


The African child, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10



Al-Ahram Weekly

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Tragedy hits home

In every culture home signifies far more than a building, however elaborate or simple that building may be. On a very basic level being at home means being safe and secure — doubly so when that home is a sanctuary from the urban jungle into which mega-cities such as Cairo, with their hustle and bustle, polluted air and jammed, perpetually noisy streets, have become.

When a modern apartment building collapsed on top of its residents and their visitors in Heliopolis this week — the third such tragedy in this same district in four years — obliterating entire families and producing the unbearable stories of horror that continue to surface from beneath the rubble of the Heliopolis building, this sense of home collapses along with it.

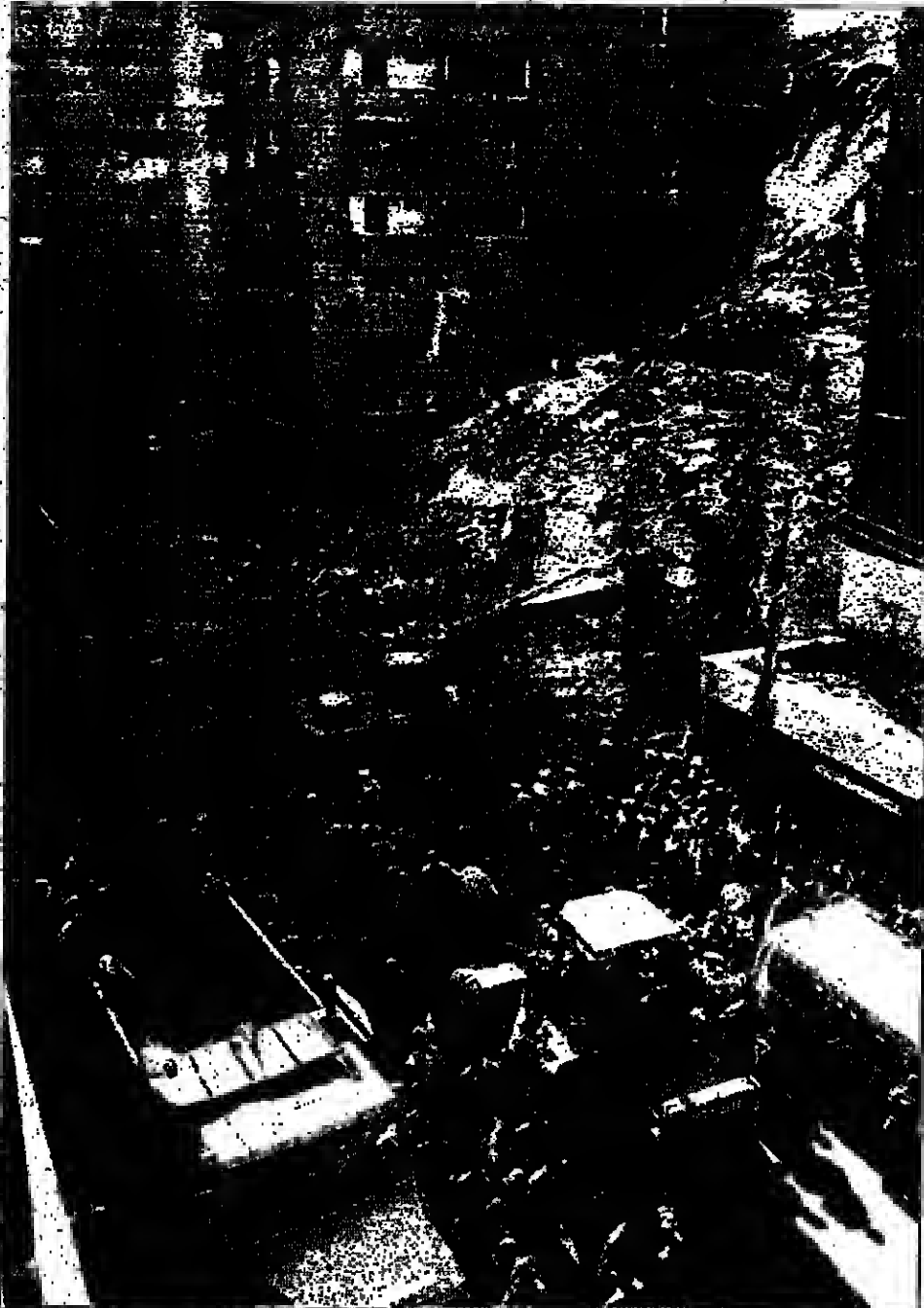
There is no denying the tragedy. The sense of horror and sorrow it evokes will be with us for some time but gradually, as always happens, it will be drowned out by city life, by the hustle and bustle from which "home" is our only sanctuary.

Nothing in the story of the Heliopolis disaster indicates that it was a one-off fluke. But while it is still too early to point accusing fingers, one thing is clear. We cannot blame fate.

We must, then, act quickly. Many questions await to be asked. To what extent does current legislation deter wide-scale abuses in construction practices? What guarantees are there that this legislation is enforced? And what of the legislation governing structural adjustments in owned, rather than leased, apartments, given that apartment ownership has replaced rentals in a great many buildings during the past two decades? Is there appropriate legislation limiting the right of apartment owners to make structural adjustments to their apartments? Do mechanisms to enforce such legislation exist?

What guarantees are in place to ensure that building violations which threaten the lives of innocent families — are redressed within a specific period of time? What of the new Building Code passed by parliament last June, which stipulates that violations will be corrected within 15 days of a ruling?

The questions are many. One can only hope that they will be answered within the next few days, and answered decisively, so that the Egyptian home can become, once more, a place of sanctuary, and a fundamental human right will be guaranteed.



An unknown number of victims still lie beneath the rubble of the collapsed building at 5 Abdallah Nour Street, Heliopolis, while anguished relatives maintain a constant vigil, hoping beyond hope that their loved ones will be found alive (see pp. 2 & 3)

Hosny Guindy



Untimely demise

WITH GRIEF and sorrow, the Al-Ahram Organisation announces the untimely demise of its general manager of advertising, Adil Afifi, who passed away Tuesday night as a result of a heart attack. Afifi, 55, had returned on Monday from a business trip to Dubai and resumed work at his office in the newspaper. Death came after he returned home Tuesday night.

Prayers for the rest of his soul were offered at noon yesterday at the Omar Makram Mosque in Tahrir Square.

Afifi was born on 28 August 1941. He worked for the advertising department of Al-Ahram for the past 25 years, rising to become a member of the board of the organisation's directors in 1985 and general manager of advertising in 1986. Afifi was also president of the Egyptian Advertising Association and the Egyptian chapter of the International Advertising Association.

Russian visit

RUSSIAN Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov arrived in Cairo yesterday in the course of a Middle East tour intended to boost the role of Moscow as a co-sponsor of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa welcomed Primakov at Cairo airport and the Russian official later visited the headquarters of the newspaper Al-Ahram to deliver a lecture. In the evening, Primakov met with President Hosni Mubarak at the Sinai resort of Sharm El-Sheikh.

Europe's role welcomed

BOTH King Hussein of Jordan and President Hosni Mubarak agreed that Europe had a role to play in the peace process, but it should not substitute or overshadow that of the US, reports Nevine Khalil from Sharm El-Sheikh.

After three hours of discussions, a business lunch and a drive through the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, Mubarak told reporters on Tuesday that Europe "has its own interests in the Middle East and its endeavours will bolster the American efforts." He added, however, that the US role is "pivotal" and cannot be replaced by any other. "We cannot say that the European role will replace the US role," Mubarak said. "That is impossible."

King Hussein agreed, saying: "Europe has an important role to play because it's close to our region; [but] is not seeking a role that would contradict that of the United States but one that would be complementary." The two leaders met to try to find ways to bridge the gap between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and review the faltering peace process. Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab countries which signed peace treaties with Israel, in 1979 and 1994 respectively. The Sharm El-Sheikh talks were also attended by Egypt's Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, his Jordanian counterpart, Abdel-Karim El-Kabarti, Mubarak's chief political adviser Osama El-Baz and

Egyptian Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif. Addressing a joint press conference, Mubarak explained that US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross left the region on Monday after failing to bring closer Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints. "Ross went back because he could not resolve the differences between the Israelis and Palestinians on schedule," Mubarak said.

Egyptian sources had told Al-Ahram Weekly during last month's Washington summit that the US wanted the two parties to reach agreement and begin implementation within 30

days of the summit.

The gap may have been narrowed slightly, Mubarak went on, "but there still remain fundamental, sensitive issues [unresolved]." He advised the two sides not to try to exploit the current deadlock and to allow time for differences to be smoothed out. "The wheel of peace [began turning] 18 years ago, and nobody will be able to stop it from moving," he added.

Mubarak, however, would not outline a time frame for progress in the peace process. Asked by the Weekly how much more patient the Arabs should be in the face of the hard-line Is-

raeli policy, he said: "I can't give a fixed date, but let us try to help so that we can proceed forward." He added that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had assured him on several occasions that he will honour Israel's agreements with the Palestinians. "We would like to help him honour his commitments," Mubarak said.

King Hussein also remarked that Netanyahu had promised him and Mubarak a "surprise", presumably progress on the peace track, and hoped that "it comes soon."

Against Syria, Mubarak said that "we must forget the word 'war' if we really want peace." He added that Israel must stop beating the drums of war, because "war is very dangerous."

Two days earlier, Mubarak met former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to discuss the current stalemate in the peace process. Peres said that Israel's government was starting to realise that its hardline ideology would not achieve peace. "Only now are they beginning to understand that if you want peace for nothing, you have nothing," Peres said in Sharm El-Sheikh. (see p.4)

Backdoor hot pursuit

Clashes with Palestinians and the threat of war with Syria provide a grim backdrop for Israel's stalemated talks with the Palestinians. Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza

After Palestinians and Israelis resumed talks on Tuesday on a partial withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron, there was no sign that an agreement was within reach. In the absence of American mediator Dennis Ross, who returned to Washington, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who is on a European tour, differences persisted. The two sides blamed each other for the continuing deadlock.

Israel held Arafat personally responsible for delaying an agreement, charging the Palestinian president sought to make the maximum possible gains from mounting domestic, regional and international pressures on the Israeli government.

For their part, the Palestinians claim that the Likud government of Benjamin Netanyahu was attempting to alter the Hebron redeployment agreement — previously reached with Labour's Shimon Peres. "The Israeli government is simply required to implement this agreement instead of wasting time and making false allegations," said Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, secretary-general of the Palestinian cabinet.

According to El-Tayeb Abdel-Rehim, secretary-general of the Palestinian presidential office, the talks snagged on Israel's demand that its troops have the right of "hot pursuit" in all of Hebron — home to about 100,000 Arabs and 400 Jewish settlers.

Although Israel officially had informed the Palestinians that it was dropping this demand, it has not, Abdel-Rehim said. The demand was put forward to the Palestinians again, but disguised to new terminology.

Israel now is claiming the right of mil-

itary intervention to deal with threats that may arise and cannot be handled by the Palestinian Authority. "This is rejected by us because what it means is hot pursuit," said Abdel-Rehim. He said the proposed new wording, which strips the Palestinian Authority of its powers, could be interpreted by Israel in various ways to suit its own interests.

Israel is lying and stalling, Abdel-Rehim said. The proof is that Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the top Palestinian negotiator, was held up for half an hour last Saturday at the Erez crossing point as he headed to a fresh round of talks at the Tel Aviv home of US ambassador Martin Indyk. Abbas was allowed to cross into Israel only on the express orders of chief-of-staff Amnon Shahak, Abdel-Rehim said.

"Who is stalling then? Arafat or Netanyahu?" he asked. Hebron was again a flashpoint of violence on Tuesday as settlers shouting "Hebron is ours" shoved, cursed and spat at two PLO officials who toured the city. Reuters and The Associated Press reported. Israeli police escorted the two Palestinians away from the area.

About 1,500 right-wing protesters demonstrated in Jerusalem on Tuesday night outside the US consulate to voice opposition to the Hebron pullout, blasting US mediation efforts as a pressure tool on Israel.

"We hope the government will stay strong and have the courage not to turn over parts of the city of our fathers to the hands of terrorists," said Dov Lior, rabbi of the Kiryat Arba settlement near Hebron.

"We are here today to help Bibi [Netanyahu] keep his promises in the people of Hebron," said Nadia Matar, 30, a settler

leader. "Any redeployment endangers all of Israel."

Hebron is the last of seven West Bank towns Israel agreed to hand over for Palestinian self-rule under peace deals negotiated with the previous Labour government.

Netanyahu, who ousted Labour in elections last May, opposed the peace deals but vowed to honour the Hebron redeployment once Palestinians agree to modifications aimed at safeguarding Jewish settlers in the town.

Violence also erupted on Tuesday in a West Bank village after the funeral of a 10-year-old Palestinian boy who relatives said had been beaten to death by an Israeli settler on Sunday.

Israeli soldiers clashed with Palestinian stone-throwers in the village in scenes reminiscent of a six-year Palestinian uprising that preceded the landmark 1993 Israel-PLO peace deal.

Other Israeli troops on Tuesday ended a large military exercise in the Golan Heights amid mounting tension with neighbouring Syria.

An Israeli army spokesman said the manoeuvres, which involved war planes, tanks and artillery units, were "routine" and had been planned in advance. Syria had used the same words to describe a series of military exercises on its side of the border.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara'a denied on Tuesday that Damascus was planning a surprise attack against Israel. The United States said wide-scale Syrian troop movements in Lebanon were not a cause for concern. But anxiety in Israel remained high. (see p.5)

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INSIDE

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ahead

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Death by folly

Rescue workers, using giant cranes and hydraulic ladders, continued to search the rubble of a collapsed apartment building in Heliopolis for survivors. But as time passed, hopes were running low. Shaden Shehab visits the site of the disaster

At 6.25pm on Sunday, the thud of a loud explosion shook a section of the upmarket suburb of Heliopolis. The deafening noise was followed by columns of dust and smoke rising into the sky. Neighbours and passersby thought an earthquake was in progress.

People, many covered in blood, some in their pyjamas, ran out of 5 Abdallah Nour Street, behind the Heliopolis Club. The 13-storey apartment building had collapsed into a heap of masonry and twisted metal, trapping residents and visitors under the rubble.

By Wednesday morning, the Interior Ministry had confirmed that 28 people had been killed, 20 injured and at least 50 others were missing. At least 23 people were pulled out alive from the debris, but some of them died later in hospital. Many of the missing were feared dead, but rescue workers continued to sift the rubble, still hoping to find people alive.

lights powered by generators. A fleet of 150 ambulances stood by to assist the injured and transfer them to local hospitals.

"Nora, Nora, my daughter Nora," wailed an elderly woman, dressed in black. "Do you believe that my daughter is buried under all this rubble? She is so young, she worked for a travel agency [inside the building]. What did she do to deserve this?"

Another elderly woman sat on the ground, slapping her face in mourning for a missing son. "This can't happen, get me my son back," she said repeatedly. Her other son tried to comfort her, but he himself was sobbing uncontrollably.

Shafiq Awad said that his brother worked for an electricity company housed in the building. "He needs a miracle to stay alive under all this rubble," he wept.

Safwat Said, who happened to be passing through the area, reported: "I heard a noise similar to an explosion, then the ground shook. I saw people run and then I could see nothing because of the heavy dust. I thought it was an earthquake."

"I saw people coming out from the back of the building, some had blood covering parts of their bodies," said Mustafa Ezzat, a resident of a nearby building.

Among the people pulled alive from the ruins were an American woman named Samantha Miksche and her Egyptian friend, Noha Mohamed Fawzi. They were found on Tuesday, 36 hours after the collapse, suffering from minor injuries. But Miksche's mother was still missing. The three were visiting the building at the time of the collapse to look at an apartment that belonged to Fawzi's uncle, which the Americans were considering renting.

"We heard a loud noise and I realised that a building had fallen down, but I thought it was another building," Fawzi said. She spent the next one and a half days "praying and reciting the Qur'an" and talking to Miksche. The two were trapped back-to-back.

Two men were saved on Monday after rescue workers heard voices crying for help. In order to reach them, the workers

had to blast a hole in a huge concrete slab in an adjacent building housing the Misr International Bank.

A third, Samir Abdallah, who owned the travel agency on the eighth floor, was saved, but was reported to be in a critical condition in hospital after losing both legs.

The missing include former Sudanese Information Minister Mohamed Mahgoub and his wife, who are residents of the building. The wife and three children of Lutfi Moussa, a diplomat with the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Cairo, are also missing. Moussa happened to be outside the building when it fell. Also unaccounted for is Khadiga Youssef Al-Torki, the sister of Ahmed Al-Torki, the Saudi Arabian under-secretary for communications. She also lived in the building.

Three of the dead were members of the same family — Jordanian businessman Wassim Al-Adnani, 45, his wife, Weddane Abdel-Mullah, 40, and their son, Mohamed, a 20-year-old student. Weddane Abdel-Mullah was pulled out alive after being trapped under slabs of cement for

nearly 12 hours, but died in hospital. Another woman, who worked for the travel agency, was also pulled out alive after doctors amputated her left leg. She also died in hospital.

The bodies of a housewife, a travel agency employee, a retired professor and a plumber were found on Monday.

There were fears that visitors to the building, which housed two clinics, an x-ray centre, the travel agency and the electricity company, could also have been trapped.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri visited the site of the tragedy on Sunday evening. He told Egyptian television: "The most important thing now is to find the largest possible number of survivors. It is too early to tell the cause of the collapse. What we are working on is getting as many people as possible out alive."

A committee of professors of construction engineering has been established to determine the reasons for the collapse. Various theories circulated. The first is that the demolition of walls by construction engineers working on an apartment on the first floor had caused one of the pillars supporting the building to crack. The apartment, located at the front of the building, was recently bought by the Federation of Egyptian Banks, which planned to use it as an exchange room. This theory is corroborated by the fact that the rear part of the building suffered only a partial collapse. Three construction engineers, alleged to be responsible for the demolition of the walls, were taken into custody and charged with manslaughter.

Gen. Moukbel Shafiq, head of the army's Engineering Corps, who supervised the rescue work, told the Middle East News Agency that a preliminary investigation had indicated that some changes had been made to the columns supporting the building. "This building, which withstood two earthquakes, could not have collapsed unless one of the columns supporting it was tampered with," he said.

Accusing fingers were also pointed at Raouf Wissa Ibrahim, the building's owner. It is said that in 1975, six years after the apartment block was built, Ibrahim added five extra storeys, despite having authorisation to add only one floor. It is also alleged that he ignored an order issued by municipal authorities in 1993 to make repairs to the building. Ibrahim has been remanded in custody and charged with manslaughter.



Prime Minister Ganzouri, Interior Minister El-Ahli, Cairo Governor Abdel-Akher (l) and Field Marshal Tantawi (r) visit the scene of the tragedy



After 36 hours entombed in darkness, rescue workers pulled Noha Ismail (above) and her American friend, Samantha Miksche



"Nora, Nora, my daughter Nora," wailed an elderly woman (left). "Do you believe that my daughter is buried under all this rubble? She is so young... What did she do to deserve this?"

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هكذا من الأصل



photo: Salah Ibrahim

Can it happen again?

"Those irresponsible, greedy criminals who waste the lives of innocent people to make extra money should be hanged." This is how Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi reacted to the Heliopolis tragedy. His remarks, probably an emotional outburst, summed up the feelings of many Egyptians, who have become tired of seeing laws made only to be broken.

And, as is customary following such a tragedy, there have been calls for tougher penalties for offenders, including one from El-Alfi himself. Although the reason for the collapse has not yet been determined, El-Alfi underlined the need to stiffen penalties for violators of construction laws. "The law should be enforced strictly and those who violate it, gambling with the lives of innocent people, should face the penalty of losing their freedom," he said. Fines, he added, are not an adequate deterrent because of the huge profits violators stand to make.

A new piece of legislation containing tougher penalties will be debated today (Thursday) at a meeting of provincial governors, El-Alfi said.

Housing Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Sulaiman said that the law dealing with construction licences will be amended to prohibit additions to already existing buildings. For example, if a licence has been issued for a four-storey building, that building should remain at four storeys; a second licence would never be issued for the building of additional floors.

The new legislation will also include tougher penalties for those who violate their construction licences, Sulaiman said.

A 24-article Construction Law was passed by the People's Assembly in June, replacing a 1976 law. It provided tougher penalties for building irregularities, and also sought to simplify the bureaucratic procedure for obtaining a construction licence. Under the new law, violators could face a sentence of life imprisonment with hard labour if their offence resulted in the

The Heliopolis tragedy revived the controversy over what is required to make buildings safe: tougher penalties or a more effective enforcement of legislation

death of one or more people. The law also gave provincial governors greater powers to curb building violations, both with regard to height restrictions — including the power to demolish violating storeys — and construction materials.

According to Talaat Mustafa, deputy chairman of the Housing Committee of the People's Assembly, the collapse of the Heliopolis building does not mean that the new law is ineffective "but it does prove that the old law was highly inadequate and largely responsible for many construction offences."

Mahmoud Mahfouz, chairman of the Shura Council's Manpower and Services Committee, shared this view. The Heliopolis tragedy, he said, was clearly the result of the ineffective legislation of the 1970s. Although the 1976 law provided penalties ranging from five to 10 years in jail for the use of substandard construction materials, poor design or implementation of designs, and inadequate supervision of work, the earthquake of October 1992 revealed alarming examples of the use of substandard materials, even in expensive areas like Heliopolis, he said.

Mahfouz argued that the problem would not be solved by new laws. The construction of substandard buildings was the result of "the ineffective enforcement of [existing] legislation."

Housing expert Milad Hanna agreed that tougher penalties "will not solve the problem. They will only scare people away

from constructing buildings." What is needed, he said, is "to change some of the officials in charge to make room for other people who are creative and innovative."

Hanna, talking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* described the collapse of the Heliopolis building as "shameful", especially as there are structures in this country that have "survived for over a thousand years."

"It is a complicated and inter-related problem that stems from economic, social and bureaucratic factors," he said. Declaring that "we simply cannot go on like this," Hanna suggested that Prime Minister Gammal el-Bashir establish a committee to study the various aspects of the issue.

The problem began with the introduction of the economic open door policy, *infatiah*, in the 1970s. "During the period of *infatiah*, building owners wanted to build extra floors in order to sell them and make a hefty profit, instead of renting them out at low prices," Hanna said.

In the 1990s, another phenomenon emerged, with owners allocating the ground and first floors to businesses, such as banks and supermarkets. The space and decoration have to be changed accordingly and no licensing is required, Hanna noted. "In the process, walls, and even columns, could be damaged."

Sunday's tragedy was the third to hit Heliopolis in five years. As a result of the October 1992 earthquake, a 15-storey building on El-Hegaz Street collapsed like a pack of cards, killing 67 people. The owner of the building, Kamela Ali Awad, her husband and a partner were each sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

On 28 January 1993, a six-storey building, also on El-Hegaz Street, came down, killing 20 people and injuring 22 others. The dead included the building's owner, Essam Ali Mahmoud.

Reported by Gamal Essam El-Din, Shaden Shehab and Jaleel Hakawi.

The only culprits?

PROSECUTION officials have filed manslaughter charges against the owner of the collapsed building, Raouf Wissa Ibrahim, together with three construction engineers, and ordered that the men be remanded in custody for four days.

Ibrahim, who owns a car sales agency and lives in Zamalek, was also accused of making unauthorized additions to the building and unintentionally inflicting damage on the property of others. According to the building's file, kept at the Heliopolis Housing Department, Ibrahim and his partner, Rifat Hassan Shehata, obtained a licence in 1969 to construct an eight-storey apartment building. In 1975, Ibrahim constructed five extra storeys, despite the fact that he had only obtained a licence for one extra floor. As a result, he was fined LE121,300 in 1976.

The file also reveals that Ibrahim was ordered by the Heliopolis Housing Department to make repairs to the building in 1993. The repairs were not made.

Under interrogation, Ibrahim denied that he had made unauthorized additions to the building, or that he had been instructed by the Housing Department to make repairs.

The three construction engineers also accused of manslaughter were named as: Ashraf Abdu El-Nagari, Ahmed Mahmoud Riad and Ahmed Shehata Abdel-Hamid. The three were employed by the Federation of Egyptian Banks to make alterations to an apartment recently bought by the federation, which planned to use it as an exchange room. The three were said to have been responsible for the demolition of walls in the apartment which could have caused one of the pillars supporting the building to crack.

A committee of professors of construction engineering has been set up to determine the reason for the building's collapse.

Brush with death

PALESTINIAN policeman Tawfiq Mohamed Hassan, who was slightly injured by the falling masonry, has cheated death for the third time, according to reports. Hassan, 26, was waiting inside an x-ray clinic in the building to undergo x-rays for bullet wounds suffered during last month's clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian police in the Palestinian territories when the collapse occurred. He suffered only minor bruises.

Hassan was one of the first victims found by rescue workers, and reportedly led rescuers to other victims trapped beneath the rubble. He told reporters that last month's shooting and the collapse of the apartment building were not his only brushes with death.

In February 1994, he was wounded in the left arm when Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein sprayed Palestinian worshippers with automatic weapons fire in the West Bank town of Hebron, killing 29 Palestinians.

"I thank God for saving my life once more," he said. "Now, I will be able to see my two-week-old son again."

Rubble thieves

AS RESCUE workers searched the rubble for survivors, others were sifting through the debris for valuables. At least 10 men have been arrested at the site of the collapsed building for stealing money and objects such as gold jewellery belonging to residents. The 10 include a mechanic, an electrician and a carpenter. They all said they had arrived at the site to help rescue workers in the search for survivors, but were unable to resist pocketing the valuables they found scattered in the debris.

14 and with no one

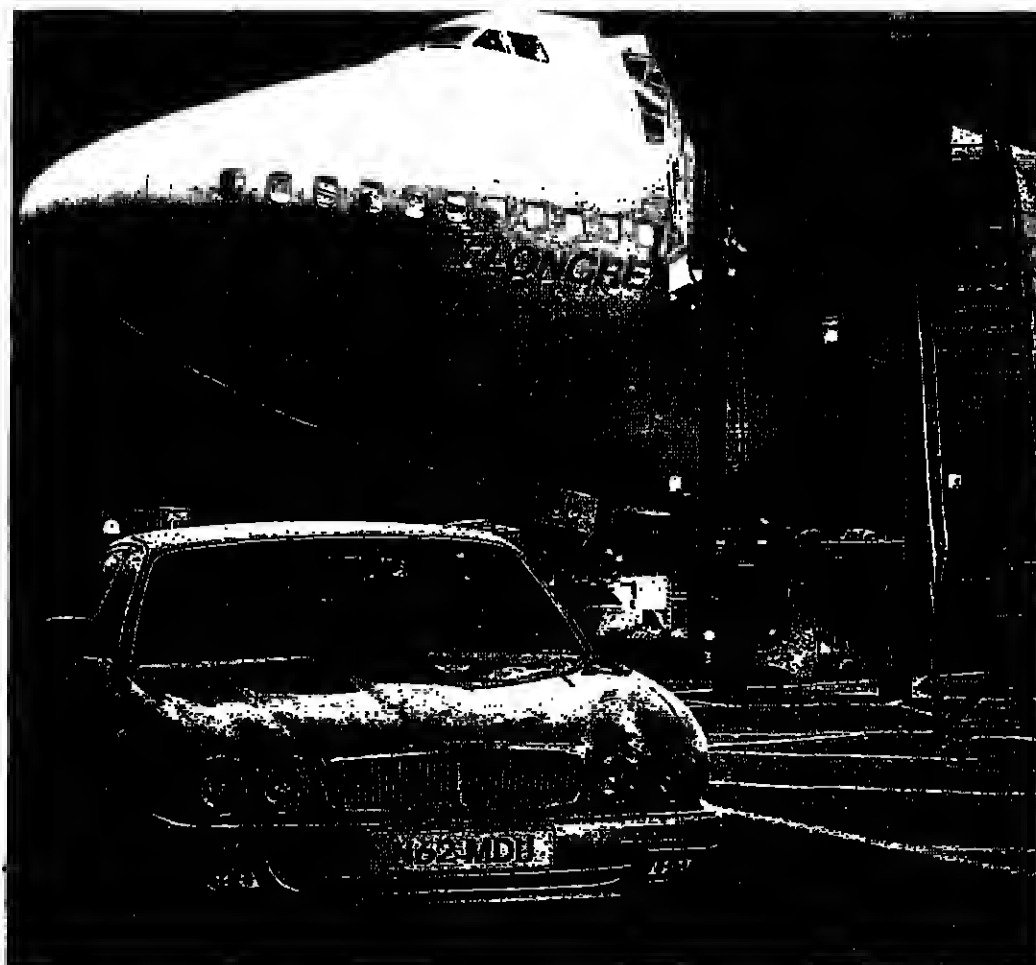
FOURTEEN year-old Hadi Mahram went to take a private lesson at 5pm last Sunday. Naturally, he expected to finish the lesson and return home to join his parents, six-year-old brother and 17-year-old sister. But on his way back, he found the streets crammed with people, police cars and ambulances. He asked one of the pedestrians of what was going on, and was told that an apartment building had collapsed. It did not occur to him that it was the building where he and his family lived until he got closer and saw the pile of rubble that had been his home.

For this teenager, whose other close relatives all live in the US, the situation is indeed tragic. He is currently staying with a neighbour in a nearby building, who found him at the scene. "I could not leave him in the streets. What would have become of him?" said the neighbour, Mohamed Es-sameddin. "We've had calls from many officials expressing their concern, but we still don't know what Hadi's fate will be," added the wife.

For Hadi, all hope lies in the rescuers pulling his family out of the rubble — alive: "They will probably find them, at least my mother," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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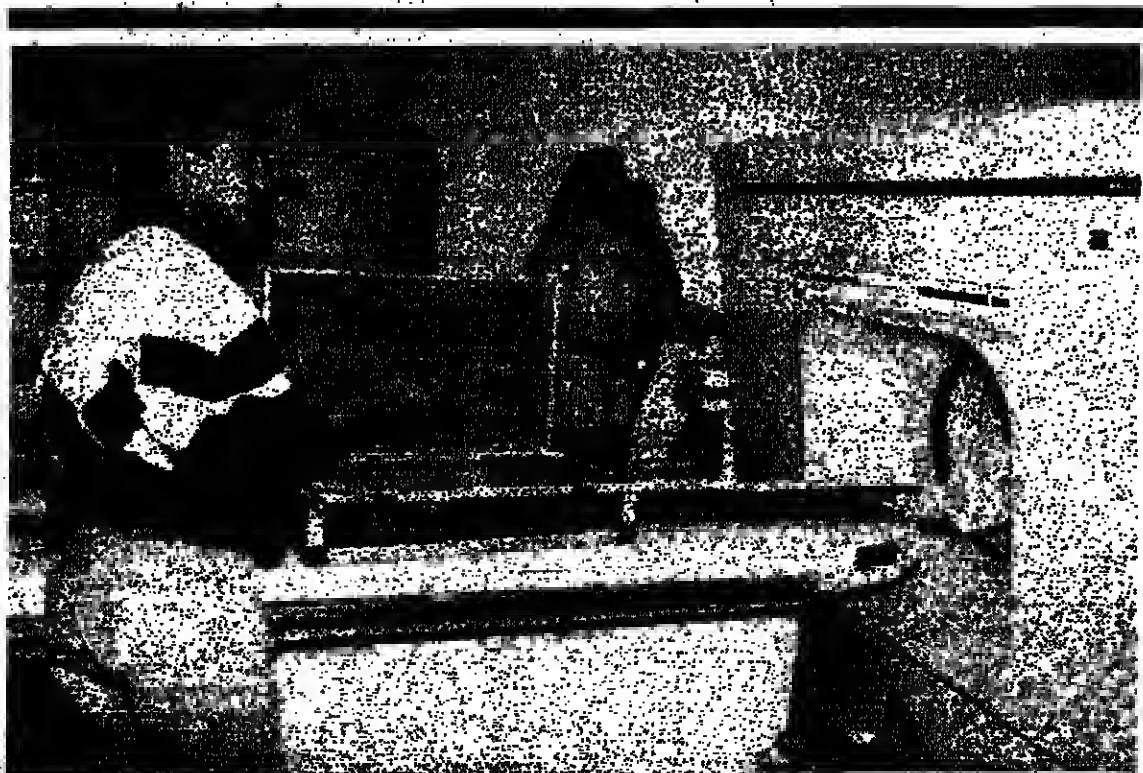
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THE MISR Radiology Centre, located on the ground floor of the collapsed building, escaped unscathed. "All the patients who were in the centre at the time survived," Dr Mohamed Abul-Hoda Darwish, one of the centre's four owners, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Darwish, who had been at the centre's other branch, arrived ten minutes after the collapse. "When I went to the site and found a huge hill of rubble, I assumed that the staff and patients had been killed. But then I discovered that a part of the building at the back had not collapsed. I found people coming

out of the centre. Only four of them were injured on their way out, and they are now in hospital.

The centre's two-million dollar's worth of equipment also survived. "The medical equipment is unscathed" and could function normally. My only worry is that it will get ruined by the rescue work," said Darwish. "Of course I'm not asking that the equipment take priority over people. But the centre is willing to take responsibility for transferring the equipment at any appropriate time."

FOLLOWING King Hussein's arrival in Sharm Al-Sheikh on Tuesday, he was escorted by President Hosni Mubarak on a tour of the resort, which overlooks the Gulf of Aqaba. With Mubarak behind the wheel of the presidential limousine, the two leaders arrived at the InterContinental Hotel, where they had coffee and enjoyed the view. They shook hands with tourists and hotel guests and posed for photographers. At a news conference following their talks, Mubarak was asked about the nature of the discussion that took place in the car between him and the Jordanian monarch. "This is a secret which I am not prepared to divulge," Mubarak jokingly responded.



On the eve of a new session of parliament, **Gamal Essam El-Din** interviews Parliamentary Affairs Minister **Kamal El-Shazli**, and anticipates forthcoming debates

Agenda for reform

In the light of the cabinet's decisions, what are the main legislative measures that will be submitted to the People's Assembly in its new session?

It was clear from the first day the new cabinet was formed under Dr Kamal El-Ganzouri that this government is committed to turning the directives and aspirations of President Mubarak into reality, speedily and urgently, by means of a well-defined timetable of plans and programmes. Foremost is the creation of the appropriate climate for raising productivity rates to the target set by President Mubarak, which is a minimum of eight per cent return on national investments. With the private and mixed sectors shouldering the major part of the task of achieving this rate, the public sector's responsibility will be confined to implementing strategic projects.

There is no doubt that a number of executive tools and measures are necessary in order to create a better climate for raising the volume of investments and, consequently, production. Foremost among them are: achieving stability, whether in terms of security or legislation; protecting investments and providing investors with the adequate and necessary guarantees while fighting monopolies and dumping practices; combating red tape and corruption; continuing to consolidate the infrastructure, ensuring that land is available for agricultural reclamation and the establishment of industrial communities; and protecting agricultural land. I think these are some of the basic factors for achieving an investment and production boom in Egypt.

Although the new cabinet is only a few months old, I can say, with complete honesty and objectivity, that the cabinet has moved quickly and accomplished much through a series of executive decisions, made within the limitations set by the Con-

stitution. As for legislation, that is the responsibility of the People's Assembly.

The government has prepared several draft laws which it will submit to the People's Assembly once the new session opens. Topping the list is a unified investment bill. This bill, which was the subject of extensive study, is aimed at fusing the legislation governing investments in Egypt into one comprehensive and clear-cut law that maintains existing investment incentives, and provides for and regulates additional ones. Besides, there will be anti-trust and anti-dumping laws to maintain productivity rates and encourage competition with the aim of improving quality.

The government is also expected to submit another package of draft laws aimed at protecting bank cheque transactions, encouraging exporters and boosting exports. These will include a unified law for civil servants, amending some articles of the criminal procedures law to speed up court hearings, and amending articles of some laws in line with Constitutional Court rulings.

Opposition parties have been sharply attacking the current People's Assembly after the Court of Cassation passed a series of rulings invalidating the parliamentary membership of some deputies.

Don't you agree that there is a pressing need for the Assembly to reach some sort of understanding with the Court of Cassation on what constitutes valid membership, or invalid membership for that matter?

I believe that the subject of the decisions taken by the Court of Cassation on election appeals [filed by losing candidates] has been addressed from various angles, with the legal experts failing to reach agreement. In constitutional terms, however, it is certain that the People's Assembly alone has the prerogative of deciding whether the membership of a certain MP is valid or not, and that reports issued by the Court of Cassation, and the conclusions contained therein, have worth within the bounds of the papers and documents submitted to it.

Obviously, we cannot predict the decision which the Assembly's legislative committee will take after it examines the court reports submitted to it. The committee's decision is referred afterwards to the Assembly, whose majority has the final say.

The opposition claims that NDP deputies failed to exercise effective supervision of the government, especially in privatisation and the sale of public sector companies. How do you re-

spond to this charge?

It is well known that the control exercised by the People's Assembly over the government's performance has different forms, ranging from requests for information, questions, interpellations [questions that cabinet ministers must answer], to requests for debating a certain issue — which should be signed by 20 members.

In filing requests for information or debate, submitting questions and interpellations, NDP deputies act independently. They are not subject to guardianship or manipulation but are guided only by their national conscience and the fact that the government is the government of the majority NDP, which implements the NDP's programme as endorsed by its members. This applies to privatisation policies or any other policies contained in the government's policy statement, which it delivers at the beginning of each parliamentary session. All deputies, irrespective of their political backgrounds, have the right to discuss the policies, issues and priorities listed in this statement.

How do you evaluate the performance of the businessmen deputies in the last parliamentary session (1995-96) in view of charges by the leftist Tagammu Party

that they managed to impose business interests on the Assembly at the expense of the interests of workers and peasants? I think that after the adoption of the multi-party system, and in light of the Political Parties law, which regulates political party activity in this country, it cannot be said that there is a party that defends workers, another which defends peasants, and a third which defends businessmen. This is not acceptable any longer because projects depend on workers as much as they depend on businessmen. Capital is not enough to launch a project.

So it is not justified to assert that businessmen managed to impose their interests because national issues are integral — one texture — and so there can be no distinction between [the interests of] one citizen and another. On the contrary, I think that the businessmen enriched the Assembly with their views, derived from actual experience, which led to the removal of many obstacles in the way of investment and exports.

Municipal elections are scheduled for next spring. How is the NDP preparing for them?

The coming municipal elections will take a new form. They will be conducted according to the individual candidacy system instead of the state system. So, all parties, including the NDP, will do their best to nominate very popular candidates.

In the NDP, we have laid down specific requisites for our candidates: popularity, a good reputation, commitment to the party and devotion to work. Of course, NDP members of the dissolved municipal councils will be given a fair chance to run for re-election after their previous performance is evaluated. The NDP lists will also include young people and women.

Laws for a market economy

Economic issues of privatisation, regional cooperation and the implementation of a new package of economic reforms recently agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are expected to dominate the new session of the People's Assembly, beginning on 7 November. The session will be the second in the five-year term of this Assembly, elected in a nationwide ballot last November-December. It is expected that Ahmed Fathi Sorour will win re-election as speaker of the 454-member house for the sixth consecutive term. However, a shadow has been cast over the work of this session by the Court of Cassation, which has invalidated the membership of as many as 200 deputies, mostly members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), but including opposition and independent members.

Analysts believe that several key domestic and regional factors will influence the Assembly as it grapples with a host of market-oriented draft laws. These include: regional economic cooperation, as embodied in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA III) economic conference, opening on 12 November; a new economic reform programme agreed with the IMF on 17 October; and the privatisation of as

many as 13 public sector companies in the last six months.

Mustafa El-Said, chairman of the Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee, believes the Egypt-IMF agreement on launching a new two-year economic reform programme will have a significant bearing on the Assembly's work in the new session. He recalled that in 1990, when Egypt and the IMF reached a similar agreement, the incumbent house "was immediately entrusted with passing a number of laws which formed an integral part of that agreement." El-Said cited the Public Sector Law No 203 (the privatisation law), the Unified Tax law, the Agricultural Landlord-Tenant law, the Commercial Arbitration law, the Financial Leasing law and the Foreign Exchange law.

The main task of the Assembly in the new session, El-Said explained, would be to give a legislative form to the economic reforms recently agreed with the IMF. "For example, the passing of a new unified investment law forms an integral part of the agreement with the IMF. So, this law is expected to top the Assembly's agenda," he said.

Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, confirmed, in an in-

terview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, (full text, above) that the investment law will be one of the Assembly's priorities in its new session.

El-Said said he expects the Assembly will also deal "with an anti-trust law, necessary to crack down on economic organisations involved in monopolistic practices." In addition, a number of "structural adjustment" laws, forming a basic part of the agreements with the IMF and the World Bank, will come up for debate, he said. These drafts will include modifications to labour and housing laws to bring them in line with a market-oriented economy.

The government's privatisation programme, which Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri decided to speed up last February, is also expected to figure prominently in the Assembly's debates. Independent opposition deputies have been angered by the way 13 public sector companies were turned over to private enterprise during the past six months.

El-Badri Farghali of the leftist Tagammu Party charged that the government had deliberately misled the Assembly over privatisation, citing the case of the flour mills. In April, Farghali said, the government an-

nounced that only 40 per cent of its shares in flour mill companies would be sold off "to prevent any monopoly of bread production, a matter of concern to millions of Egyptians." The government had reneged on this promise, Farghali claimed, and sold off its majority shareholding (61 per cent) in four out of six flour mill companies.

Farghali told the *Weekly* that he would direct an interpellation to Atef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector, on "slimy practices" associated with the privatisation programme and on alleged interference by the ministry in trade union elections.

The nature of the lobbying role of the Egyptian-American Presidents' Council is also expected to figure for the first time in parliamentary debate. The council, which was formed in 1994 as part of the Egypt-US partnership, is made up of 30 businessmen — 15 Egyptians and 15 Americans. One of the Egyptians, Mohamed Abul-Enein of Ceramex Cleopatra, is a member of the People's Assembly and another, Mohamed Farid Khamis of Oriental Weavers, is a member of the Shura Council.

While no one denies that the Council does advise on legislation — this being

well within its mandate as an advisory body — opposition deputies charge undue influence. They claim that of 52 economic laws passed by the Assembly in its last session, 19 were advocated by the Presidents' Council.

But Economic Affairs Committee Chairman El-Said denied that the Assembly was pressurised by the council in the exercise of its legislative function. "This council is an advisory body that does not have the power to dictate anything," he said.

Another batch of draft laws advocated by the Presidents' Council will be debated in the Assembly's new session. One of them, according to Abul-Enein is a proposed amendment of the commercial litigation law designed to speed up the settlement of commercial disputes in Egyptian courts.

However, as the Assembly goes about its task of giving its legal blessing to a market economy, the Court of Cassation rulings, invalidating the election victory of as many as 200 MPs, will continue to cast a shadow over the validity of the proceedings. These rulings have been largely ignored by the house, which maintains that, under the Constitution, it alone has the exclusive authority to decide on the validity of a deputy's membership.

Costly calls

A mobile telephone service is to begin operation within days, but for many would-be subscribers, the charges have proved prohibitive. **Amira Howeidy** reports

Subscribers to Egypt's mobile telephone service will be able to use the hi-tech system as of Sunday — nine days before the opening of the Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III) on 12 November. But the National Telecom Organisation (ARENTO) had a surprise in store for those who came forward to sign contracts in response to an advertisement in the Arabic-language press. A subscriber who had to pay LE2,000 in installation fees was also required to pay a three months subscription — LE160 x 3 — in advance, plus a LE100 insurance fee. Moreover, ARENTO said it would give priority in the "first stage" of the new service to those who had applied for car telephones between September 1993 and January 1995.

Ibrahim Magdi, a gynaecologist, withdrew his application when he realised just how much it would cost. "I didn't mind paying LE2,000 as initial fees, but why should I pay more? I don't understand why I must pay LE160 each month or why I have to pay in advance. I changed my mind after I realised that my telephone bill for the first year could amount to LE6,000," he said.

So far, 35,000 people have applied for a mobile phone, only around half of ARENTO's target. Nevertheless the new service has netted around LE70 million in revenue for the organisation.

In addition to the LE2,000 installation fee and the LE160 monthly subscription fee, a subscriber will be charged 60 piastres for every minute he uses the mobile — compared to 15 piastres for three minutes on the regular telephone. As if this was not enough, ARENTO's chairman Osman Lutfi announced that non-subscribers who call a mobile telephone user would be charged 60 piastres per minute, a fee which, some argue, could prove bad for business.

"The mobile may end up putting off a lot of people," said Ahmed Badran, a salesman with the Nile Engineering Projects Company. "Those who want to contact someone with a mobile will have to think twice before doing so."

Since the Ministry of Transport and Communications announced in June that it had signed a contract with the French Alcatel Company to install a 70,000-line mobile telephone network, critics have been highlighting the exorbitant cost of the new service. Officials from both the ministry and ARENTO had hoped to attract a full quota of 70,000 subscribers, who would bring in revenue of LE140 million. The fact that only half that number came forward could possibly be ascribed to "the high cost in relation to the average annual per capita income in this country, which is \$600," according to an Alcatel official, who requested anonymity. "On the other hand," he added, "ARENTO's monopoly on providing the service leaves the agents of mobile telephone companies with a very modest profit after tax."

According to Badran, the taxes begin with a 70 per cent import tariff, to which is added a 16 per cent sales tax and other duties amounting to 5 per cent. "This adds up to nearly 100 per cent of the original price," Badran said.

The price of mobiles available on the market in Egypt ranges between LE1,700 and LE4,000. However, in what appeared to be an effort to compromise, the Ministry of Transport and Communications decided last month to allow the private import of mobile telephones, provided they are compatible with the Global System Mobile (GSM). But this liberalisation did not amount to much in practice because ARENTO announced shortly afterwards that it would provide its service to imported mobiles only if they were compatible with the brand names sold by the 15 telephone company agents in Egypt.

Defending ARENTO, chairman Lutfi said: "In order to cover the network's costs, amounting to LE65 million — which is only for the first stage — we had to guarantee an income of at least LE70 million. So where is the profit?"

ARENTO was aware of the frustration suffered by many people who found the cost of a mobile phone prohibitive, he added. "This will not last for long. We are just beginning; most countries which have this service went through the same experience."

Middle East watchers say that Egypt has lagged behind other countries in the region in introducing a mobile telephone service. And when the government finally made up its mind to go ahead, would-be subscribers were deterred by the high costs.

'Iron lady' ordered back to Cairo

An Athens court has ordered the extradition of Hoda Abdel-Moneim, but the so-called 'iron lady' has appealed the decision. **Sameh Abdallah** in Athens and **Mourid Sobhi** in Cairo report

The Athens Appeals Court, acting on the request of the Egyptian government, has ordered the extradition of the 'iron lady', businesswoman Hoda Abdel-Moneim — who fled Egypt 10 years ago after reportedly cheating dozens of people out of millions of pounds. Abdel-Moneim immediately filed an appeal against the decision.

The government's case against Abdel-Moneim rests on a three-year prison sentence passed against her by a misdemeanour court for issuing a bad cheque for \$50,000. Other sentences imposed by the Egyptian courts in absentia have now expired under the Egyptian statute of limitations, but the government wants her returned to serve the three-year sentence and face possible further prosecution.

While living in Egypt, Abdel-Moneim had run a land development company called Hodeco. She is said to have collected millions of pounds from would-be buyers as payment for apartments in buildings being constructed by her company. But instead of delivering the apartments to the buyers, or re-imbursement them, she fled the country, allegedly with the help of a senior official.

After the Egyptian branch of Interpol filed a request for Abdel-Moneim's extradition, she was remained in custody by an Athens

court for 20 days, later extended for another 20 days. During the court hearings, Abdel-Moneim claimed that she was a victim of mistaken identity, and that her real name was Safiya Mohamed Sallam. But the Athens court rejected this claim, and approved the extradition request.

Legal sources said her lawyers' move to contest the extradition was a formality, and would probably be rejected by the court. More important, the sources said, was the approval of the court's decision by the Greek minister of justice. However, while out under a legal obligation to endorse the ruling, it is not customary for the minister to intervene in court cases.

Abdel-Moneim's lawyers had contended that the three-year sentence, on which the Egyptian government has based its case, was no longer in effect because it was passed in absentia in 1993. Under Egyptian law, they argued, a sentence for a misdemeanour expires after three years if it was passed in absentia.

But representatives of the Egyptian government responded that the sentence had been passed in the presence of Abdel-Moneim's lawyers and did not, therefore, qualify as being passed in absentia. Consequently, under Egyptian law, it remains in effect for five — not three — years.



Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

مكتبة من الأصل



The body of Helmi Shoushi, the 10-year-old Palestinian boy beaten to death by a Jewish settler, is carried to his grave by his family in the village of Husan in West Bank (photo AFP).

US turns a deaf ear

THREE UN humanitarian agencies issued a joint statement on Monday, decrying the situation in Iraq and calling for urgent contributions to the UN relief effort.

In a news conference in New York, the heads of the UN Humanitarian Affairs Department, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Food Programme (WFP) expressed alarm at the dearth of critical supplies in Iraq, saying that only 4 percent of the funds they asked for had been donated by the international community.

Carol Bellamy, the director of UNICEF, told a news conference that 4,500 under five years of age were dying each month from hunger and disease. Catherine Bertini, director of the WFP, said: "The humanitarian situation throughout Iraq is dismal, and with the onset of winter, will become critical for tens of thousands of women and children and other Iraqis who already are living well below the poverty level."

The head of the UN's Humanitarian Affairs Department also said only France and the Netherlands have responded to the UN's 27 September call for funding to help Iraq until the oil-for-food deal comes into force.

In Washington, however, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns, reacted coolly to the reports, saying that the United States has no way of evaluating "the degree of the crisis" in Iraq because it has no diplomats on the ground there. He laid the blame for the tragedy of the Iraqi people on Saddam's shoulders. "If he started taking some of his personal fortune and money and spending it on his own population, then I think the Iraqi people would be better off," Burns said.

New ambassador

THE ISRAELI Foreign Ministry on Tuesday named a new ambassador to Egypt, filling an important post which has been vacant for more than two months. Career diplomat Zvi Mazel, who heads the Africa desk at the ministry, was named as the replacement for the former ambassador, David Sultan, who had reportedly complained that he was largely boycotted in Cairo, reported Reuters.

Relations between Israel and Egypt which, in 1979, became the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, have been strained because of a lack of progress in the peace process since the election of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last May.

European link

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat stressed during talks yesterday with Irish President Mary Robinson that international and European pressure was needed to push the Middle East peace process forward. He also thanked the European Union for its recent efforts to lead a helping hand.

Arafat is on a high-profile, four-day European tour including stops in Norway, Ireland and Spain.

The Spanish ambassador to Israel, Miguel Angel Moratinos, who was appointed on Monday as the EU's new Middle East envoy, told the Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* that he hoped to build confidence between the parties involved in the peace process.

Qatari cabinet

QATAR'S Prime Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani, appointed a new cabinet yesterday, and concurrently retained the post of interior minister. Other members of his family also kept their previous portfolios in the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and finance, while the ministries of communication and transportation, education, culture, public health and Islamic affairs received a change in leadership, AFP reported.

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, who approved the new government had, for the first time, separated the posts of head of state and head of government by appointing on Tuesday his half-brother, Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani as prime minister. The Qatari emir, however, held on to the position of defence minister in the new cabinet, and is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He also approves and passes laws and can call a meeting of the cabinet.

On 22 October, Sheikh Hamad, in an effort to put his house in order, appointed his third son, 18-year-old Jassem, as Qatar's crown prince.

Gaddafi in Tunis

LIBYAN leader Muammar Gaddafi, speaking to members of the Tunisian parliament on Tuesday, criticised Arab countries for failing to implement joint projects nearly 40 years after deciding on economic union in 1957. Gaddafi stated he was willing to welcome two to three million Tunisians to Libya provided they were ready to undertake useful jobs. He then ridiculed the US role in the Middle East peace process.

On a five-day official visit, the Libyan leader arrived in Tunis on Monday overland from Libya because of the UN air embargo imposed on his country since 1992.

In a related development, French diplomatic sources played down the possibility of a rapid resolution of the diplomatic deadlock with Libya over the 1989 downing of a UTA plane over Niger which killed 170 people. The Libyan ambassador to Paris had previously told a businessman's meeting that the UTA investigation was on the path to resolution after the French anti-terrorist judge concluded his investigations in July.

Keeping the temperature high

The break down of the Hebron negotiations this week has resulted in a stand-off between Netanyahu and Arafat. It is now a matter of which side blinks first, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

The clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank village of Husan on Tuesday serve to remind just how incendiary is the "quiet" that has descended on the Occupied Territories since the mini-war exploded between Israeli and Palestinian forces in late September.

The cause of this latest round was the funeral of Helmi Shoushi, an 11-year-old Palestinian from the village. Palestinian eyewitnesses say Shoushi was beaten to death on 27 October by an Israeli security guard from the Jewish settlement of Hadr Betar, near Hebron. The guard, Nahum Korman, allegedly entered the village after stones had been thrown at the settlement, grabbed Shoushi at random and then beat him with a rifle butt until he was unconscious. Masked Palestinians at Shoushi's funeral called for the "hanging of the criminal settler". Israeli border police have recommended Korman in custody.

Following the killings of two Palestinians in the West Bank last week — one of which, a roadside shooting of a Palestinian driver, suggestive of settler involvement — Palestinians suspect that acts like the Husan attack are ploys by settlers to wreck the army's impending redeployment in Hebron. Palestinian frustration is compounded by the fact that the redeployment appears no closer now than it was in September.

Despite last ditch interventions by President Clinton and Jordan's King Hussein, the main Palestinian/Israeli negotiations on Hebron broke down on 27 October. Joint sub-committees on the issue are continuing to meet. But with PLO leader Yasser Arafat

away in Europe until the end of the week and the US's special envoy at the talks, Dennis Ross, returning to Washington, no one expects an agreement anytime soon. "Arafat cannot meet Netanyahu if the meeting will not resolve suspended issues," said PLO negotiator, Hassan Ashraf, last week.

Israeli negotiators accuse Arafat of dragging out the talks on Hebron in the belief that he will get "more Israeli concessions" after the US presidential elections on 5 November than before. "An agreement could have been signed Sunday night," said Israel's defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, on 28 October. "But (Arafat) decided to go away". Palestinian negotiators counter that Israel still seeks to "reopen" the Hebron agreement rather than implement it.

The critical dispute remains Israel's "right of pursuit" into Palestinian areas once redeployment takes place. Under Oslo's interim agreement, the Israeli army has the power to "engage" in Palestinian areas to "bring to an end an act or incident" which endangers Israeli lives or property. In Hebron, says the Israeli government's media advisor, David Bar-Ilan, this means the army can enter Palestinian areas "before a terror attack occurs as well as after it".

Palestinian negotiators say that such an interpretation would enable the army to enter Palestinian Hebron (around 80 per cent of the entire city) at will rather than in response to an emergency. They insist that any Israeli re-entry into their area must be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and via joint PA/Israeli patrols. "What else are the joint pa-

trols for?" says chief PLO negotiator, Saeb Erekat. The result is a stand-off between Netanyahu and Arafat, and the resolution a matter of which side blinks first.

Yet Arafat is clearly playing hardball on Hebron. One reason is domestic. The PLO leader knows that the original interim agreement on Hebron is hardly popular among the city's 120,000 Palestinians (around 15,000 of whom will stay living in the 20 per cent of Hebron under Israel's military control). Further concessions to Israel's presence in the city are bound to be seen as a sop to the settlers and at the sole expense of Hebron's Palestinians.

But another reason is political. Arafat feels he can now hang tough with Likud on Hebron due to the formidable coalition of national and foreign forces he has marshalled in the aftermath of September's confrontations.

The most immediate force for the PLO leader since the confrontations has been his enhanced stature on the Palestinian street. Polls taken in recent weeks show that 61 per cent of Palestinians agree with his call to halt hostilities pending resolution of the Hebron negotiations, 51 per cent believe the confrontations strengthened his leadership and a colossal 85 per cent now "approve" of the PA's security forces, especially those who took up arms against the Israelis. This is some reversal from August when Palestinian took to the streets in Nablus and Tulkarm to demonstrate against Arafat's governance and his security forces often brutal execution of it.

Arafat has a long history of harvesting Palestinian unity out of politi-

cal crises. But, less typically, he has exploited the current crisis to sharpen divisions within Israeli society. In recent weeks, Arafat has met with Israel's President Ezer Weizman and Labour opposition leader Shimon Peres to "save the peace process" and, thereby, heighten the isolation of Netanyahu. Members of his Fatah movement were also invited to the Knesset on 16 October by Jewish/Arab Hadas Party (leader of the far right Mokedet Party, Rehavam Ze'evi, was thrown out of the Knesset for shouting, "Murderers have come in!"). The next day, a joint protest by Fatah and Israel's leftist Meretz bloc marched through Ramallah under the banner, "Let's make the peace process work".

These moves suggest a new maturity by Arafat and Fatah towards the schism within Israeli political society. Israeli political commentator, Haim Baran, explains why such tactical alliances are vital to the Palestinian interest. "It is clear that the Palestinians are diplomatically better off with Likud," he says. "Most of Israel's secular middle class" (the natural constituencies of Peres and Meretz) "want Oslo to continue to secure better lives for themselves" and reject "the settlers' belligerency and Netanyahu's excesses".

Arafat's decision to hold out on Hebron for as long as possible thus works to aggravate Netanyahu's isolation and intra-Israeli dissension, both of which are in the Palestinian interest. But keeping the temperature high in the Occupied Territories is also a high risk gambit. And, as the Husan clashes show, it only takes one settler to start a fire.

France vows to be Lebanon's shield

Chirac's 21-hour state visit is not only symbolic of France's ongoing support of Lebanon but also aims to strengthen political and economic ties with Lebanon, **Zeina Khodr** writes from Beirut

It was his second official visit to Lebanon in less than six months and yet again French President Jacques Chirac was given a hero's welcome. Chirac's visit was part of a regional tour aimed at instituting a greater European role in the Middle East peace process. It gained him many friends in the Arab world, especially after he called for the establishment of a Palestinian state and after he urged Israel to respect the principle of exchanging land for peace as the basis for negotiations.

He is also a hero in Lebanon's eyes because of his support for the country's reconstruction efforts and his bid to liberate the territories occupied by Israel in South Lebanon. Chirac vowed that France would not allow Lebanon to become the victim of regional settlements.

Arabs have been calling for increased European influence in the peace process to balance the pro-Israeli stand of the United States. The EU is the main aid donor to the region and wants to have political influence as well. But in Beirut, French and European differences surfaced. During a press conference, Chirac slammed the European Union Commissioner Leon Brittan for criticising his drive for Europe to co-sponsor the peace process. Responding to Brittan's statement that individual European countries should abstain from independent action, Chirac said: "Commissioners should not interfere in matters that are not theirs."

According to Emily Khoury, a col-

umnist in the daily *An-Nahar*, France needs the support of all European countries if it is to have political weight in the region. "France alone cannot coerce Israel to respect the principles agreed upon during the Madrid conference. It needs EU backing. The European countries can pressure Israel since they have economic agreements which could be jeopardised if the Jewish state does not consider Europe's position," she wrote.

While Washington is against the European Union and particularly France taking a role in the peace process beyond financial assistance, the American change of attitude to Lebanon Ron Schleiker said. "While lots of people would like to think that there is a problem between the United States and its allies, differences do not detract from the fact that we work for the same aim which is a comprehensive peace."

Schleiker added that France's regional diplomacy is not conflicting with US policy in the region. But last April during Israel's 16-day onslaught against Lebanon, Washington and Paris crossed each other's paths. Both US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his French counterpart Hervé de Charette undertook a shuttle mission to try to end Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath. Both countries managed to be part of the April ceasefire understanding.

Foreign Minister Pares Bouczi stressed the important role France played in the region during Israel's

latest onslaught against Lebanon. France has the confidence and the support of the Arabs which was vital in reaching the understanding. Bouczi described France's participation in the ceasefire monitoring group as crucial. "I think the credibility of the French position is an important fact. France's participation in the monitoring group is an asset for Lebanon," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The presence of a French representative in the group means that its decisions will be more balanced and just. This is why Lebanon lobbied very hard and backed the idea of France's participation."

The five-nation cease-fire monitoring group was set up after Israel's wide scale onslaught last April. It consists of military representatives from Lebanon, Syria, France, the United States and Israel and it is charged with looking into violations of the truce between Lebanon and Israel. Bouczi added that the results of the group's two meetings were credible. "It took into consideration the source of the aggression, namely Israel. It was a fair decision and this is directly related to France's presence," he said.

But Chirac's diplomatic efforts are also part of a bid to reap economic benefits in the region and most notably in Lebanon where a multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan is under way. One of the fruits of Chirac's visit is a bilateral investment agreement to be signed in Paris next month. During Chirac's visit, French Trade Minister Yves Gallard discussed trade and ec-

onomic relations with his Lebanese counterpart Yassen Jabber. The French official made the point that French companies were the only ones that stayed in Lebanon during the war and that most of them are currently carrying out the reconstruction projects. During his tour, Chirac tried to gain the support of the Middle Eastern leaders for his campaign to increase Europe's role in the US-sponsored peace talks. This plan was backed in Lebanon, as it had been in other Arab states. But France needs the support of its European partners as well as the United States and Israel. The latter it is not likely to get as the Jewish state considers Europe biased towards the Arabs.

Even Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri acknowledged the obstacles Chirac faces. "He is a close friend of mine. His second visit to the country shows the strong ties between Beirut and Paris. It also manifests France's backing at all levels. But EU involvement will not tilt the balance in our favour. It is a good sign but it is not enough to compete with America's hegemony in the region," he said.

The Middle East is traditionally a French sphere of influence. And Lebanon was France's former protectorate. Even if Chirac will be unable to directly take part in peace negotiations, France's adamant support to Lebanon — as was clearly witnessed during Israel's wide-scale attack last April — is welcomed in the country.

Europe's better option

By **Mona Makram-Ebeld**

"Europe is more than a geographical nation but it is less than an answer." This sentence by a renowned European professor of international relations summarises well Europe's ambivalent position at the end of the century in which it started out as a central player and the origin of two world wars.

With Mr Chirac's path-breaking and highly applauded visit to the Middle East in the background, an international seminar took place in Vienna entitled "The Euro-Arab Dimension: One Year after Barcelona." Organised jointly by the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue and the Arab Thought Forum, Arab and European participants, tried over two days of intense debate to define Europe's role in world affairs, its potential and impact, as well as the several difficulties it is consequently facing.

During the debate on the European Union's role in a changing world, the European Union's ambivalences were underlined. Mr Chirac's visit, though highly appreciated and deemed to have a long-term impact on the region, was not seen as representative of EU policy. Germany, for example, had a different view and a word of caution was sounded on the concept of a single EU foreign policy. While it is true that the EU members are no longer completely independent states, they are still far from having one voice when it comes to foreign policy. Conflicts of interest on political and economic issues continue to exist. There is still no common denominator on which the future policy orientation of the continent could be based.

Most likely, there will never be. Additionally, Europe's own future holds several major uncertainties, among them the future of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Russia, and these states' future relations with the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance. As for what is of interest to us, there is uncertainty about the future of the very heterogeneous Mediterranean area.

In all this fluidity, the European Union is the only legally established institution with a tremendous economic potential and a comprehensive political mission. Europe imports from 60 to 70 per cent of its energy from the southern rim of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Its economic welfare is also dependent on the availability of cheap labour for menial jobs either in the EU itself or on its close periphery (e.g. labour intensive services, construction work, seasonal agriculture). Petro-dollars, although less important than in the 1970s, continue to nourish Western Europe's financial systems. The EU shares with the Maghreb, the Mashreq, Israel and Turkey the Mediterranean Sea and therefore is directly affected by environmental hazards originating in those areas.

Politically, rising extremism is at least as important a challenge to liberal democracies as economic mismanagement. The latter characterises Eastern Europe and Russia; the former, sometimes together with the latter, characterises Europe's southern periphery. This can result in acute crises that cause massive unwanted migration flows made up of economic and/or political refugees toward Europe. All these elements have over time, albeit in varying degrees, attracted the attention of the European Union. European economic interests are substantial in the region; its spectrum of interests much larger than we think.

Therefore, the question is, can Europe play the role of a protagonist of regional cooperation and integration? The answer is a definite yes. It has to implement its Mediterranean policy (decided upon in Barcelona last year) and reactivate its policy towards the Middle East. It can use the ad-hoc coalitions of states willing to play a greater role in contributing to the overall development of the southern states. What we are witnessing here is a growing flexibility of arrangements between a number of partners who are asking for more action from Brussels. They can help to organise a limited policy overriding the lack of full consensus on EU foreign policy. The potential is there; what is missing is the political will for prolonged efforts.

Since it can, should Europe play a more determinant role in the region, as Mr Chirac advocated? The answer is a definite yes for several reasons, prominent among them the fact that the European Union, being the only legally established institution, is qualified to play the role of pacifier. On the other hand, after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the Balkans, there is an Islamic dimension that must be taken into consideration. There are 12 to 15 million Muslims who live in Europe, among them 4 million in France alone. The mechanisms to integrate these populations have ground to a halt and in France, Great Britain, and Germany, restrictive measures on immigration have crystallised these problems as well as the inability of Europe to adopt multiculturalism. The result is that these communities are not considered European.

Finally, Europe has two options: Either it can go along with Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" pitting against each other the Islamic and Western civilizations, doing much more damage than good. Or else, it can adopt a more positive attitude, in line with its values of tolerance and respect of human rights, to initiate a new effort at mutual understanding which will lead to peaceful co-existence on both shores of the Mediterranean. One should not forget that Europe is the only continent where Christians, Muslims and Jews live together in all or most of its states.

'Pain, pain and more pain'



Sohaila Andraous in Oslo, sharing an intimate moment with her daughter, Layla, before her long ordeal started

Has a conspiracy been hatched to make former Palestinian guerrilla Sohaila Andraous's life hell? Dina Ezzat investigates the possible reasons behind her retrial in a hijacking case re-opened after 19 years

A high state security court in Hamburg, Germany, is expected to sentence a former Palestinian guerrilla, Sohaila Andraous, to life behind bars. The 46-year-old is facing charges of murdering the pilot of a Lufthansa airliner that she co-hijacked in the 1970s.

Andraous has pleaded not guilty, but her lawyers believe that she does not stand much of a chance of avoiding conviction. For her family, the whole episode is shrouded in ambiguities and sadness. "It is all so silly and so meaningless. This hijacking happened some 20 years ago. She was tried and she served her sentence. Why are they bringing it up again now?" said Ahmed Abu Matar, Andraous's husband. Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in a telephone interview from Oslo, where Andraous and Abu Matar have lived since the early 1990s, Abu Matar denied that his wife was guilty of killing the Lufthansa pilot.

Andraous's case dates back to 1977 when, in collaboration with three other Palestinian guerrillas, she hijacked a Lufthansa plane flying from the Spanish island of Majorca. The hijackers forced the pilot to take the plane to Yemen and then to the Somali capital Mogadishu. They demanded the immediate and unconditional release of Palestinian political activists jailed in Israel and several European states, including Germany.

But in Mogadishu, the Somali government made a deal with its German counterpart by virtue of which the Somalis allowed a German special force-

team to storm the plane. According to the terms of the deal, any surviving hijacker was to be the responsibility of the Somali government. Andraous was the only survivor. "She survived the attack of the special forces team, but her body was almost riddled with its bullets," said Abu Matar. Following treatment in a Somali hospital, Andraous was tried by a Somali court and sentenced to 20 years behind bars. Andraous served 18 months before her poor health qualified her for a special pardon from former Somali President Siad Barre.

Once free, Andraous drifted between Beirut, Damascus and Cyprus before she finally settled down with her husband and daughter, now 10 years old, in Oslo.

In October 1994, Norwegian law enforcement agents arrested Andraous with the intention of extraditing her to Germany. She was eventually extradited last November after a year of debate on the legality of the action.

"They did that despite the fact that at two stages, two Norwegian courts of law found it unconstitutional to extradite Sohaila, who had asked for political asylum from the Oslo government," said Abu Matar. Katrin Rath, second secretary at the Norwegian embassy in Cairo, commented: "The matter was debated in the press and there were voices opposed to the extradition."

Those who opposed the extradition criticised the Norwegian government for "violating the spirit of peace that at one point helped broker between the Israelis and Palestinians," Abu Matar said, adding: "I do not under-

stand it. Sohaila was a soldier of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation... Arafat, the chairman of the PLO, was granted a Nobel peace prize for consenting to peace. So why are they honouring the leadership at the same time as they are retrying the soldiers?"

According to Rath, the decision to extradite Andraous "was only a legal decision... It was a judiciary problem and the judiciary system made a point of not mixing politics with legal issues."

Abu Matar disagrees. "It is all political. The Germans have political interests in re-opening this long-closed file," he said. The theory of Andraous's lawyers is that the Germans want to use Andraous as a witness against someone from former East Germany who is currently facing charges of smuggling German-made weapons to Palestinian resistance fighters. "They have blatantly offered Sohaila a deal for her release in return for being a witness for the German prosecutor against this woman," he said. "But of course Sohaila refused because a political activist like her could never agree to such a cheap bargain." Meanwhile, Andraous has repeatedly complained to her husband and lawyers that she has been "continuously subjected to insults and humiliation" in police custody in Germany.

After almost two decades, it is difficult for Andraous's lawyers to find witnesses to testify in her favour. The German government, on the other hand, finds it very easy to call any of the surviving passengers and have them tell their horror stories of being

on a hijacked plane. Diplomatic efforts were exerted by the Palestinian National Authority to pressure the Germans to release Andraous. "The peace process should dissuade us from re-opening closed files," commented Mahmoud Abbas, a key member of the PLO Executive Committee.

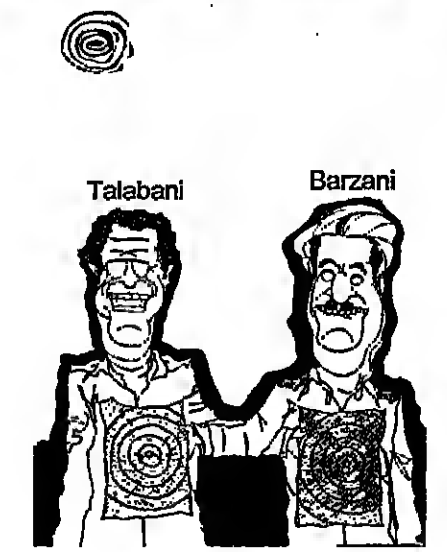
A committee headed by Yasser Abd-Rabbou, the Palestinian minister of culture, has launched a campaign of support for Andraous. "Retrying Andraous is an outright violation of all the rules and principles of the peace process," Abd-Rabbou said.

According to Liana Badr, co-ordinator of the support committee, the group sent a delegate to attend the hearings in the Hamburg court of law and contacted several diplomats and politicians in Germany. But "it all failed," Badr said.

Andraous has been driven to despair. In a letter to her husband, she asked him to tell her lawyers to drop the case because she cannot accept the fact that her friends and supporters are collecting money to help pay her lawyers' bills. Her friends, supporters and lawyers are determined to keep fighting.

The lawyers, pessimistic about a not-guilty verdict, are hoping to get the court to convict her of being an accessory to murder rather than of murder. This would mean a sentence of 15 years, which they would plead she served in Norway or even at home because of her deteriorating health.

For Andraous it is all bleak. "It is the Palestinian destiny: pain, pain and more pain," she said.



Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese opposition leader

The black vote

The US presidential race is a critical turning point for African Americans, argues Garland Thompson

Bill Clinton continues to hold an impressive lead over Republican Bob Dole after two nationally televised debates and a sharp encounter between their running mates, Vice-President Al Gore and Jack Kemp. Political analysts say there is little real difference between the positions of former Senator Dole and the president, but they are wrong.

The two men differ in a fundamental way, especially where African Americans, Latinos and other minorities are concerned. Clinton puts it this way: "Bob Dole is focused on the past; I am focused on the future." In a nutshell, it is that focus on the past which so troubles African Americans.

It is only 30 years since the social rebellion of the 1960s, when blacks everywhere rose against racial subjugation and demanded their rightful place in American society. When Dole and the Republican right speak of "returning" America to its "old, cherished" values, that sounds to African Americans like back to the bad old days of national insensitivity to the suffering of millions under the yoke of segregation in the pre-1960s South. When they back that rhetoric up with congressional bills and lawsuits seeking an end to special efforts to bring racial minorities into the mainstream in education, employment and political access, arguing for a "colour-blind society" which has never existed here, it rings alarms all over Black America.

A short look at the progress brought about by these special efforts, under the umbrella of "Affirmative Action" carried out to effectuate the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and similar acts which followed it, shows what is at stake.

Census data tell the story. As of 1940, two-thirds of all African Americans were poor. Less than half had completed secondary education. Their population was concentrated in the American South, where segregation laws and a whole set of biased social mores confined them in the poorest housing, the poorest schools and the poorest-paying employment. Mob violence, terror bombings and Ku Klux Klan raids, often carried out with the tacit consent of local law enforcement, kept all African Americans, of whatever colour, fearful of challenging the system.

Then, in 1954, came the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision, striking down segregation law. In 1955, Martin Luther King launched the civil rights movement with a bus boycott. Blacks everywhere rose and demanded access to better schools, better jobs and a better political voice.

In less than 20 years, census data showed that African Americans "turned the corner." While access to education, sparked by the protests and supported by new government aid programmes, moved blacks from below the poverty line into the middle class. The 1970 Census showed more than half of all blacks were no longer poor. By 1980, only a third of all African Americans were poor, and that holds for the 1990 Census. Some 15 per cent of all African Americans 25 years old and older — 1.5 million — are college graduates. Another 3 million completed one to three years of college, and 75 per cent of all African American children are completing secondary education. As the famous data book by Chicago-based Target Market News shows, African Americans now earn and spend more than \$300 billion dollars each year. That is a Gross Domestic Product bigger than most of the countries of the world.

That progress, lauded publicly by many, has become a target for right-wing whites, fearful of their place of privilege in this society. Loud calls for an end to racial "preferences" in education and employment, heard in the halls of Congress and in lawsuits by right-wing legal groups, amount to a demand that the United States return to the insensitivity of the past. Racial "colour-blindness," in this context, amounts to a refusal to look at the effects of racial exclusions.

Bob Dole once was a somewhat liberal senator, who once strongly backed efforts to moderate the exclusions of the past, but over the last decade has changed his stance. Ronald Reagan's presidency brought right-wing policies across the board into the White House, and many congressional seats changed over to the right-wing with his election. Reagan stacked the federal courts with right-wingers, who began to turn back the clock on civil rights, refusing to enforce the Constitution and protect racial minorities against racial discrimination in a line of backward-facing decisions. George Bush, another former moderate, continued Reagan's policies and Reagan's approach to high court appointments.

The Congress, still led by moderate Democrats, rebuked the high court with the Civil Rights Act of 1990, overturning the worst of those decisions. Bush vetoed the legislation, becoming the second president since the 19th century to veto a civil rights law. Congress finally overcame his objections in 1991.

Bill Clinton threw the Republican right out of the White House in 1992, and now sits poised to replace a large number of federal judges about to retire. That includes expected Supreme Court vacancies. If Clinton does not win re-election, Dole will make those appointments. And Dole has already signed onto the right-wing agenda.

The stakes for African Americans are very clear, 100 years after the Supreme Court's infamous Plessy v. Ferguson decision legitimising segregation in America. Either Bill Clinton wins, or a right-wing polity will control the courts, pushing the clock back yet again.

In the Congress, African Americans lost a major part of their clout when Newt Gingrich and the Republicans took over, because Congress passes bills by careful balancing acts. With right-wing Republicans in control of committee appointments, supported in their political thrusts by right-wing Democrats, the Congressional Black Caucus has lost its leverage over key legislative provisions. If the Democrats should regain power, the Blacks' political voice would be leadership of 10 legislative committees and subcommittees.

That's pretty high stakes. Bill Clinton and Bob Dole may be fellow travellers in many ways, but the attachment of Dole to the worst of his political right's mean-spirited agenda means he cannot be a viable choice for African Americans, regardless of his call for a "new" civil rights agenda.

The writer is editor of US Black Engineer magazine, is the former editor of the Philadelphia Tribune, America's oldest black newsweekly, and has been a commentator for the daily Philadelphia Inquirer and the Baltimore Sun.

CIA gets cracking

Contras and crack are a new tragedy for black America and the Third World, argues Jooneed Khan

Nearly a decade after the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) thought the firing, though inconclusive, Congressional and Special Prosecutor investigations had laid to rest the Iran-Contra file, a regional west coast newspaper, using a local, domestic angle, has brought the issue back to life with a vengeance.

Its premise is simple enough: the crack cocaine epidemic which exploded in California in the 1980s was fuelled by Nicaraguans linked to the CIA and in dire need of funds to finance and arm the Contras who were fighting to topple the then pro-Cuban Sandinista regime in Managua.

Focusing on the trial in San Diego of Ricky Donnell Ross, the *San Jose Mercury News* in August published a hard-hitting series headlined "Dark Alliance: the Story Behind the Crack Explosion" and written by reporter Gary Webb. Ross, aka Freeway Ricky, is an African-American high-school dropout in his thirties who amassed a colossal fortune dealing in crack in the Los Angeles area and who faces life imprisonment for conspiring to sell cocaine to the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 1992.

"For the better part of a decade, a San Francisco Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funnelled millions in drug profits to a Latin American guerrilla army run by the CIA," said the investigative report in its lead paragraph on 18 August. "This drug network opened the first pipeline between Colombia's cocaine cartels and the black neighbourhoods of Los Angeles, a city now known as the crack capital of the world."

The lengthy series draws on declassified reports obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, federal court testimony, undercover tapes, court records in the US and abroad, hundreds of hours of interviews over the past year, and research done by two local reporters in Nicaragua.

According to the report, Ross's main supplier was one Oscar Danilo Blandon Reyes, scion of an elite Somoza-era Nicaraguan family ruined by the Sandinista's revolution, and a marketing graduate. He worked for a notorious drug dealer named Juan Norwin Meneses Cantarero and for Colonel Enrique Bermudez, the Somoza regime's liaison with the Pentagon who ran the Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense (FDN), or Contras, from his base in Honduras.

Bermudez also coordinated with the Salvadoran air force to ship plane loads of cocaine from Colombia to the US, and more specifically to the Los Angeles area, where an ounce of cocaine cost post snorters, actors and yuppie professionals up to \$5,200 — Smoking \$20-worth of "crack" could get African-American teenagers a 10-times greater high. The cocaine money went to buy arms for the Contras and local pushers got enough money to buy handguns and set up their own gangs.

"In Honduras, Mr Bermudez told us the end justifies the means, OK. So we started raising money for the Contra revolution," Blandon testified during Ross's trial in March. It was Blandon who helped the DEA entrap Ross in the cocaine scam last year, and he got a \$45,000 reward for his job. He now works for the DEA. As for Meneses, he has never spent a day in a US prison, even though records show that the federal government has been aware of his cocaine dealings since at least 1974, writes Gary Webb.

The network was active from 1981 to 1986, when President Ronald Reagan was committed to helping the Contras but could not get Congress to vote significant financial support for them. When Congress finally approved a \$100-million package for them in 1986, the network was downgraded and Ross was convicted and jailed for a short time in 1988. Blandon, Meneses, Bermudez and others in the network were working with the CIA, but Ross knew nothing about

this. "Shortly before Blandon took the stand in San Diego [last March] as a witness for the US Department of Justice [against Ross], federal prosecutors obtained a court order preventing defence lawyers from delving into his ties to the CIA," writes Webb. And he quotes Assistant US Attorney L. J. O'Neale, Blandon "will admit that he was a large-scale dealer in cocaine, and there is no additional benefit to any defendant to inquire as to the Central Intelligence Agency."

The mainstream national media, major newspapers and television networks ignored the exposé, but it has lingered and keeps growing on the Web page of the *San Jose Mercury News*, a 145-year-old daily based in California's Silicon Valley with an average daily circulation of 300,000 and which is part of the Knight-Ridder Group of 33 US dailies comprising the *Miami Herald* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The Web page, maintained by a staff of 16 including nine editors and which is accessible at the address <http://www.sjmercury.com>, has kept the issue alive, giving it national and international exposure and igniting widespread indignation and anger within the African-American community, whose children are being increasingly devoured by the crack epidemic in the black ghettos nationwide.

"While the FDN's war is barely a memory today, black America is still dealing with its poisonous side effects. Urban neighbourhoods are grappling with legions of homeless crack addicts. Thousands of young black men are serving long prison sentences for selling cocaine. And the LA gangs, which used their enormous cocaine profits to arm themselves and spread crack across the country, are still thriving, turning entire blocks of major cities into occasional war zones," writes Webb, adding that there is also a "sentencing disparity"

since "cocaine snorters get three months in jail while crack smokers get three years."

With just a few weeks to go before the November elections, the Black Congressional Caucus has jumped into the fray, organising angry meetings and demonstrations from Los Angeles to Washington. CIA chief John Deutch, who has admitted that "rogue elements" may have been involved but denied any CIA institutional role in this racket, has been directed by President Bill Clinton to order an internal inquiry, jointly with General Barry McCaffery, the administration's new drug czar.

The African-American leadership is unimpressed, and California Democrat representative Maxine Waters wants a Congressional hearing. Black civil rights activist Dick Gregory, a former co-show host, Joe Madison, recently took the whole "dark alliance" file to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, to turn it over to Deutch. "We tied up the yellow police ribbon around crime sites to make the point that we had identified the scene of the crime, that there are people here who have funded a war with the blood of our children," said Gregory.

They were arrested and jailed, but then quickly released after a demonstration drew 1,500 angry citizens. Pressure has also been building up on radio hotlines, and alarmed phone calls and e-mail to Congress. In the meantime, Judge Marilyn Huff, overriding objections from the prosecution, has postponed Ross's sentencing to allow defence lawyers time to obtain documentary proof of CIA links to Ross's crack dealings.

Belatedly, the mainstream national media has approached the story, but only indirectly. "All the major newspapers are doing stories about the story, but

The writer is the senior international editor of the Montreal-based *La Presse*.

Ghali calls for anti-terrorism pact

UNITED Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has called for a binding international agreement that would commit states to steps aimed at ending global terrorism. Boutros Ghali said in a speech at America's Harvard University that countries must work together to place international restraints on terrorists.

Ghali said the UN can help bring states together in the fight and provide a legal framework for anti-terrorist measures. He warned that terrorists have sophisticated international alliances, communications and funding. They receive arms and training from governments which they have secured with and, therefore, leave them alone, he added.

Ghali said he was reviewing international conventions relating to terrorism — the international convention against hostage-taking, for example, and the international convention against offences committed on board aircraft. He said he would present his findings to the General Assembly. He added that he hoped to expand international agreements against arms trafficking and fund-raising and other activities in support of terrorism.

In his address to the General Assembly last month, US President Bill Clinton also appealed for international cooperation to fight terrorism.

Meanwhile, at the UN, the chairman of the Organisation of African Unity repeated African support for Boutros Ghali's re-election, which the US opposes. The secretary-general's official term ends on 31 December.

Florida race riots

RACE RIOTS rocked St Petersburg, Florida, last week after a white police officer shot and killed a black motorist. Scores of extra police with loudhailers ordered African American youth off the streets. Black youth resisted and pelted the street corner where the black motorist was slain. At least 20 people were injured and 30 buildings burned. Over 30 people were arrested. At the height of the violence, 300 to 500 officers were deployed in the area, including those from two neighboring counties and the highway patrol, said St Petersburg police spokeswoman Linda Davis.

The United States Justice Department sent a conflict resolution team and began a preliminary inquiry into the riot. St Petersburg Mayor David Fischer called on the US Civil Rights Commission to evaluate the city's race relations.

St Petersburg basked in the limelight two weeks ago when it hosted the vice-presidential debate. Last week, streets on fire and angry blacks throwing rocks and bottles. Intifada-style grabbed the headlines. St Petersburg, a retirement haven on the west coast of Florida, is home to 250,000 people. Roughly 20 per cent of its population are black and live in the impoverished South Side area.

Malta steers away from EU

MALTA'S opposition Labour Party, which has vowed to keep the tiny Mediterranean island nation out of the European Union, won last weekend's general election. According to the final tally released on Monday, the Labour Party defeated the conservative Nationalist Party by 7,633 votes out of an electorate of nearly 275,000.

Outgoing Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adema, whose right-wing Nationalist Party ended 16 years of Labour Party rule in 1987, conceded defeat and asked head of state Ugo Mifsud Bonnici to name a new head of government. The voting was, in effect, a referendum on the international aspirations of the island: joining the EU or pursuing an independent course under a party that once forged close ties with Libya.

Alfred Sant, the leader of the Labour Party, opposes the push for Malta to become part of the world's largest trading bloc. His strategy was to appeal to voters' patriotism and pocket. Sant claims EU membership would cost the country its traditional neutrality and national character, and promised to repeal an unpopular 15 per cent tax on consumer goods. He has not offered an alternative revenue-raising plan nor indicated if he would seek to re-establish the socialist's close trade and military cooperation with Libya. Sant also wants to pull Malta out of the NATO-led Partnership for Peace framework. In the 1970s, Malta ordered NATO to close its base and negotiated the removal of all British military facilities in the country.

Malta, a former British colony, has become Libya's lifeline to the outside world ever since the United Nations imposed an air travel ban in 1992 to force Libya to turn over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan-Am jetliner. Ferries carry travellers and goods the mere 230km between Malta and Libya.



A child victim of the bloody ethnic conflict in the border region between Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire. Thousands of people have been displaced as a result of the war (photo: AP)

Blood always tells

In Central Africa, too many neo-colonial cooks spoil the region's delicately balanced tribal broth, warns Gamal Nkrumah

What's cooking? A bloody stew, if you ask me. "The situation in the border region between Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire is worsening hour by hour and it is increasingly difficult to tell who is fighting who," a Red Cross statement warned this week. The ferocity of the fighting is reminiscent of the horrific events that occurred in 1964-65, when 500,000 Zaireans died, and in 1978, when Marxist-inspired groups under the umbrella of the Congolese National Movement took up arms against Zaire's central government. The groups confessed to being followers of nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba, who was brutally murdered by the lackeys of colonial forces in 1961.

The correlation between ethnic tensions between Francophones, Walloons and Flemish-speakers in Belgium, the former colonial master of Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi, and ethnic clashes in Belgium's former colonies is hard to miss. Zaire has some 200,000 ethnic groups speaking some 500 different languages. The sprawling African nation, a veritable political power-keg, has 450 political parties. Zaire has had a bloody history of secessionist rebellions beginning with the notorious Moise Tshombe's abortive independence bid for the mineral-rich Katanga — now renamed Shaba — province, which generates 80 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Today's sad events might be the straw that finally breaks the Zairean camel's back.

What does one do with Africa's 1,500 tribes? Is there actually such a thing as a tribe in contemporary Africa? Ethnic groups are fragmented by class, creed and political affiliation. Yet tribesmen are bundled together by an arbitrary tag which actually has no place in reality. It is said that Africans cannot forge a purposeful consensus and that African tribal factions cannot overcome their rivalries. The much maligned concept of nation-building in the 1960s was a winning formula.

Today, there is no clear sense of citizenship in much of Africa. The Banyamulenge are ethnic Tutsi who originally from Rwanda, moved to eastern Zaire 200 years ago. Hutu refugees, numbering some 1.2 million, who fled Rwanda and Burundi and took refuge in Zaire, resent the Banyamulenge and are trying to remove them from Uvira, South Kivu province, eastern Zaire. Today, the Banyamulenge are fighting the Zairean army and joining Zairean opposition forces. Zaire threatens to

withdraw their citizenship and expel them. Yet Zaire is only 36 years old.

A conversation that took place a couple of years ago springs to mind. "[Rwanda's Defence Minister Paul] Kagame, the country's actual strongman, is a Tutsi you know. Blood always tells. You can tell by his regal bearing and his aquiline features," a fellow reporter told me as the Kenya Airways plane we had boarded an hour earlier in Nairobi was grounded on the tarmac at Kigali's international airport on the outskirts of the Rwandan capital because of a technical fault.

Europeans — mainly Belgian, German and French — leaving the war-torn country filed past carrying a few personal belongings. "They are fleeing this bleeding land," he said, shaking his head. "The ethnic Tutsi are Africa's Jews." Reason didn't entirely mask the derision in his tone. "Are the Tutsi Africa's Jews or its Nazis? Perhaps, they are Africa's Zionists," I ventured. The governments of both Rwanda and Burundi are dominated by the mainly Tutsi military establishment in the two countries. Today, the Tutsi control Rwanda and Burundi and might soon overrun eastern Zaire. They have a close working relationship and blood ties with Uganda's rulers. They control the sources of Africa's two longest rivers — the Nile and the Congo. They are a force to be reckoned with. The fate of the continent lies in their hands.

As preparations for the millennium become more frenzied, we are reminded that ethnic conflict is gaining currency among disparate African nations. Tribalism in Africa is portrayed as if it is a reason for the continent's backwardness when it is the manifestation of a continent in transition. Africa is exercising its inner demons, voodoo-style, in a last-ditch attempt to deal with deteriorating social conditions. That's the way the cookie crumbles on the continent.

Paul Kagame is no smooth talker; he is a rough fighter. Rwanda's President Pasteur Bizimungu is a very different man. He is a model of civility. He is an ethnic Hutu who heads a predominantly Hutu government that champions the rights of the ethnic Tutsi — half a million of whom were slaughtered by Hutu chauvinists in 1994. In an interview with Bizimungu last year, I was struck by the impartiality of his public persona, which was instrumental in uniting his war-torn nation under a multi-ethnic coalition government. The disparity between Bi-

zimungu and Kagame is bewildering.

The ghoulish fascination of the international media with the brutality of ethnic conflicts on the continent is also perplexing. Terror found its way to the small screen last week. The scenes on television are full of clichés of primeval terror such as wild, hungry and angry eyes; perhaps, even ritual slaughter and the washing of spears in blood. Violence is riding roughshod over national boundaries. The African nation state is itself bedevilled by the quest for legitimacy. The people live in anguish.

Bloody score-settling wars are rife. In Rwanda's genocidal civil war of 1994, Hutu extremists backed by Zaire massacred over 500,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu before the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front seized power in Rwanda. The scale of the exodus of Hutu refugees is frightening. The National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD), the main Hutu Burundian refugee organisation, is unable to cope. United Nations attempts to organise a 20-day emergency food airlift into the area have been foiled because of the violence. The CNDD and other Hutu organisations want to destabilise Rwanda and Burundi, the Rwandan Patriotic Front warned. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Nairobi put the number of displaced persons at over 500,000.

The London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies has dismissed the Zairean army's fighting capabilities. The institute said in a statement issued this week that the Zairean army is ill-equipped and unable to patrol and secure the country's borders. The Banyamulenge's People's Democratic Alliance has allied itself with three Zairean leftist forces — the Popular Revolution Party, the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of the Congo and the National Resistance Council for Democracy. According to the institute, the People's Democratic Alliance has some 50,000 fighting men.

Democracy is not necessarily the harbinger of peace and political stability. Burundi's 1993 elections were widely acclaimed as a model of democratic transition. A couple of months ago, the Tutsi-dominated Burundian military usurped power, ousting the democratically elected civilian administration. External actors were not irrelevant. Rwanda and Uganda had a hand in the coup, making it all the more unseemly to Zaire and Kenya — the two main sympathisers of Hutu extremists. France, too, was unhappy. Hutu leaders who mas-

terminded the Tutsi massacres in Rwanda are hunted down. Colonel Theoneste Lizinde, an entrepreneur Augustin Bugirumuna were murdered in Nairobi recently. The Rally for the Return of the Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda, a Hutu organisation, bitterly protested. Last week, European Union special envoy Aldo Ajello travelled to the Great Lakes region of Africa to take the issue up with Rwanda's and Burundi's leaders.

Zaire has registered a formal protest with the UN Security Council, accusing Rwanda and Burundi of infringing upon its territorial integrity. The country is in danger of disintegration. Secessionist activities in the snow-capped mountains of eastern Zaire are just the tip of the iceberg. Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku is in Switzerland recuperating after an operation for prostate cancer. His violent anti-communist crusade elicited the approval of Western powers, who turned a blind eye to the kleptocratic culture that took Zaire by storm.

Analyses of African calamities are invariably premised on the argument that Africans cannot rule themselves. Are democracy and development projects that Africa cannot undertake without outside help? "Peace can only return to the region through negotiation — in the framework of an international conference," said French Cooperation Minister Jacques Godfrin. German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel recalled Germany's ambassador in Kinshasa, Kigali and Bujumbura, telling reporters in Bonn that Germany was doing "all that can be done to ease this dangerous situation." America's permanent representative to the UN, Madeleine Albright, is pressing for an international conference to stop the killing. For once, UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali agrees with her. The two want serious preparations before they go ahead with convening the conference.

Africans are clutching at straws. The Maastricht conference of the Global Coalition for Africa in November 1995 was followed this week by a conference in the Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou. The coalition is a consortium of American, European and Japanese politicians and businessmen and multinational conglomerates with interests in Africa. Again Africa was condemned to democracy. In some quarters, that appears as a life sentence of sorts. Donors pushed for tight conditions for the setting of key policy instruments. Again Africa is forced to make bricks without straw.

The lesson of Dearborn

James Zogby draws a moral from the story of a city in Michigan, where Arab Americans organised themselves politically

In 1985 Mike Guido first ran for mayor of Dearborn, Michigan, a city of 100,000 people, 20,000 of whom are Arab. As part of his campaign, Guido mailed to every home in Dearborn a pamphlet entitled "Let's talk about the Arab problem." In the pamphlet Guido denied the large number of Arabs who were moving into Dearborn. He described them as threatening "our neighborhoods, the values of our property and our dream of good way of life." Using scare tactics about Arabs was Guido's way of winning votes.

I went to Dearborn in the midst of that crisis to do work with the community. Our analysis was simple: Arab Americans in Dearborn were vulnerable to attack because they were weak and unorganised. With only 1,100 registered voters, they were easy prey. I said then that, with our community comprising 20 per cent of the population of Dearborn, we were not the "problem" of Dearborn, but "the promise of its future." It was our responsibility to transform ourselves into that promise. During the next 10 years we registered voters and mobilised community participation in politics. Today, thousands more Arab Americans are voters, hold public office and form a strong bloc in both the Democratic and Republican parties in Dearborn and Michigan, and are among that city and state's most respected citizens.

So it was no surprise that when the Arab-American Institute held its annual national leadership conference in Dearborn on 20-21 October 1996 — the first such conference outside of Washington — Mayor Mike Guido came to our banquet to deliver a warm welcome to his Arab-

American friends. What has happened in the intervening 10 years? The Arab American community has grown in stature and the mayor, quite simply, can count votes. It has become important in Michigan to take the Arab American voters seriously.

Guido's appearance was but an example of the new Arab American role in politics in evidence at the conference. The conference, "Decision '96: The Arab American Vote," was designed to focus attention on the importance of Arab Americans in both Michigan and Ohio. A statewide political rally had been held in Cleveland, Ohio, the night before the Dearborn conference. Both states are home to large Arab American communities.

Participating in the two-day Dearborn event were the state's Republican governor, John Engler, both its senators, Republican Spencer Abraham (an Arab American) and Democrat Carl Levin (a Jewish American whose re-election campaign has been endorsed by most in the Arab American community), a number of members of the House of Representatives (most notably our own Nick Rahall), candidates for a wide range of elective offices, leading officials in both political parties and national leaders from both the White House and the Dole campaign.

Before the conference actually began, a meeting of Palestinian American leaders was held in a nearby hotel to publicly endorse President Bill Clinton. Campaign officials on hand to receive the endorsement thanked the Palestinian leaders and pledged that the president would continue to back the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. The

next day's newspapers featured a bold headline: "Palestinian leaders turn to Democrats — Clinton gets backing in Dearborn." In another endorsement announcement, a group of Lebanese American businessmen presented the Clinton campaign with their backing for the president's re-election. It, too, was received with appreciation.

Both cases were a far cry from 1988 when the Democratic presidential nominee, Michael Dukakis, actually rejected Arab American endorsement, or 1984 when the Democratic nominee, Walter Mondale, returned donations from some Arab American contributors. Once again, a clear example of the progress being made by Arab Americans in the political mainstream.

The policy discussions at the Arab American Institute conference were equally noteworthy. While significant attention was given to the issues of Palestine, Lebanon and US-Arab relations, there was substantial discussion about a number of domestic policy concerns. So intense was the discussion on immigrant rights that one observer commented, "I remember when we couldn't get Arab Americans to discuss domestic issues at our conferences; all they wanted to talk about was the Middle East. Now we can't get people to focus on the Middle East." But that, too, was a sign of progress.

Arab Americans have definite concerns about Middle East issues and, as a recent poll shows, there is a deep community consensus in support of the peace process, Palestinian statehood and Lebanon's sovereignty. What is new is that Arab Americans today have become articulate defenders of their domestic policy concerns, while

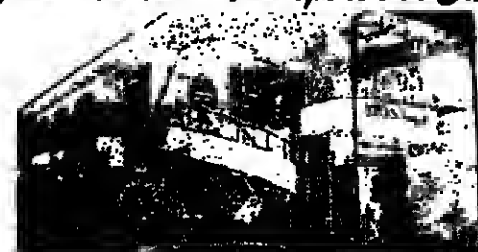
their community leaders are often to be found in the forefront of the national debate on these questions. This represents growth and maturity and political sophistication.

What the Michigan conference made clear is that Arab Americans have crossed the threshold into the US political mainstream. Arab Americans who have laboured for years trying to get inside, must now shake off old complexes and recognise new responsibilities and opportunities. This does not mean that there are no problems plaguing Arab Americans — in a democracy every group must continue to remain vigilant, to defend its rights and to insist on fairness. We Arabs Americans still have powerful foes who seek to weaken us and exclude us, but we also now have powerful allies who will defend us and whom we must now also support.

The lesson we have learned is that complaining and protesting, while useful in some instances, are limited in effectiveness. Organising oneself and registering to vote and mobilising that vote, on the other hand, can produce real victories. They can break down barriers and build a community's stature. What we must do now is continue to intensify our effort on this path and build on the experience of Dearborn's Arab Americans.

What the past decade has taught us is that political respect is hard won. It requires dedicated and committed community activists and a focus on electoral politics. On this path we not only earn the recognition we deserve, but we achieve the access that will advance our community's concerns as well.

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Council call: come and get it

Among the several items on the agenda of last July's meeting of the Presidents' Council in Washington with President Hosni Mubarak and US Vice-President Al Gore, was the presentation of projects at the third Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III). Over the following three months, council members were in earnest to put together a package which would highlight the strides taken to reform Egypt's economy and to introduce new forms of cooperation in line with the growing trend for an integrated global economy. As a result, 13 well-documented, fairly large scale projects were produced by the council's New Business Opportunities Task Force.

A set of tough criteria, including a minimum of \$10 million in capital and incentives for investors, were set as a prerequisite for participation. Egyptians and Americans worked together to prepare the projects, and some disagreements emerged, revolving around whether the projects were big enough for the 12-14 November conference in Cairo.

"I think we have a very good package," said Ibrahim Hussein, secretary-general of the Presidents' Council. Hussein believes that the MENA III in Cairo will be more business oriented than the previous two MENA conferences, which were held in Casablanca and Amman, even though "chance-

as for tremendous success have been dampened" because of the current tension surrounding the peace process.

The intransigent policies adopted by the new right-wing government in Israel, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, dampened hopes for a fruitful and productive business conference, to such an extent, that for some time Cairo appeared to be contemplating cancelling or postponing the conference. For its own part, the Presidents' Council was divided over what would be more beneficial for Egypt — holding the conference on time or not. "Keeping Egypt's interest in mind, the council decided that politics will take second seat to economic concerns," stated Hussein. President Mubarak, he added, was "a very good listener" to the council's opinion, which focused on "Egypt first".

To a certain degree, the apprehension stemming from the political turmoil has been circumvented, in part because of MENA III's significance to Egypt. When Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri took office in January, recalled Hussein, he stressed his desire that the conference be "a celebration of Egypt's achievements and economic reforms". Since then, the government, with input from the coun-

cil, worked to reform its economic policy and the pertinent legislation. Hussein said that progress on the part of both the Egyptian and American members of the council has been "impressive".

The business community now realises that the government's role during MENA III will be, said Hussein, "to assist, promote and encourage Egyptian businessmen to make contacts at the conference." The Presidents' Council will present two types of projects during MENA III: three finalised projects to showcase Egypt's economic progress which need an occasion for ceremonial signing, and another 10 which are still looking for investors.

Showcase projects include the aluminium foil and packaging project, which is an example of the numerous joint-venture opportunities available in Egypt, both with the public and private sectors. The project aims to use semi-finished aluminium products by Mir Aluminium Smelter to produce more valuable downstream products.

A second project ready to be signed is the Locomotive Manufacturing Project, where Egypt's state-owned rail manufacturer will establish a private-sector joint-venture enterprise for the man-

ufacture of locomotives domestically. SEMAR, a public-sector company manufacturing rail vehicles, will own about 25 per cent of the equity in a company to be controlled by the US electronics and defence contracting giant, General Electric. The fruit of the project, which combines technology transfer, privatisation and enhanced manufacturing capabilities, will appear on the local market by 1998 and, within one or two decades, exporting to neighbouring countries is expected to begin.

An environmentally-friendly showcase project is the Nile River Clean-up Project, where an American manufacturer will license the transfer of necessary technology for the eradication of river hyacinth, a weed which has long been a thorn in the Ministry of Irrigation's side. Under this project, Ellicott International will license Egypt's state-owned TERSANA to locally assemble dredges used to remove the hyacinth clogging the Nile and irrigation canals. The project will also enhance TERSANA's chances as a candidate for privatisation.

As an example of the government's close working relationship with the private sector, the council will profile two companies offered for privatisation in coordination

with the Ministry of Public Sector. The first, the Nasr Glass Company, Egypt's leading glass and crystal manufacturer, will be transformed into an Egyptian shareholding company, and new investment should help this local market-leader move into the export market. The second company ready to be taken by shareholders is the Porcelain Dinner and Utility Ware Company, a major factory producing porcelain, sanitary ware and tiles. The company is currently looking for a new owner willing to cover its LE16.2 million price tag.

Other council projects of interest include a flower export scheme, which will take advantage of Egypt's agricultural potential, labour and water resources, as well as Israel's proven technology and markets for cut flowers. This Egyptian-Israeli project will be run by a joint stock company established under Egyptian law, and will target the \$1 billion European flower market. "About a year ago, Israeli businessmen told the Egyptians they export \$600 million in flowers, but now there is no more land and labour is too expensive," Hussein recalled. "They proposed a joint-venture which has tremendous potential."

Also in the works is a \$51.1 million joint-venture agriculture-

related project for the manufacturing of Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) using cotton stalks, resin and wax from the local market. Egypt grows 360,000 hectares of cotton every year and, therefore, has abundant quantities of cotton stalks, the main component in manufacturing MDF. "This brilliant project will transfer refuse stalks into money," Hussein noted. "It will also break up the life-cycle of the cotton worm and reduce the damage it does to the crop." Currently, the Ministry of Agriculture spends LE150 million per year fighting the worm, a pest which presents a serious threat to the harvest.

In the field of energy, the Presidents' Council offers the first Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) initiative of its kind in Egypt. The Sidi Krir power plant is a project which reflects the government's willingness to allow for private sector participation in infrastructure projects — in this case, in cooperation with the Egyptian Electricity Authority (EEA). The selected BOT developer will invest \$350 million to finance, design, construct and operate the Sidi Krir project, and then sell power to the EEA. At the end of a concession period, the BOT developer will transfer ownership of

the plant to the EEA.

Also in the field of energy is a mega-project for a Gulf of Suez petrochemical facility, which will be realised at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion. Egypt's Ministry of Petroleum is planning to install a large petrochemical manufacturing complex and seeks as its partner a major multinational in the same field.

The council also offers two projects within the framework of Egypt's Technology Development Programme, which is concerned with supporting private-sector high-technology industries. The first project in this area is for \$80 million high-tech business incubators. The second is a water processing foundry, the cost of which is estimated at \$315 million. This project will be instrumental in boosting the microelectronics industry in Egypt.

In the sector of tourism, the council will offer a project which makes use of Egypt's tourism potential, especially in coastal resorts such as the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh. The complex in Sharm El-Sheikh will cover an area of 1,000 acres, with sea front development stretching out for four kilometres, and will cost \$63.9 million.

"We need to show we are more than talk," Hussein said. "The message to the outside world is come and get it, with the early bird getting the most."

The road from Casablanca

Mona Qassem, reviewing previous Middle East economic conferences and their outcomes, argues that to date, it is Israel which has gained the most

The idea of organising an economic conference between the parties involved in the Middle East peace process dates back to 1993, when Shimon Peres, Israel's prime minister at the time, published a book entitled *The New Middle East*.

In the book, Peres discussed a new vision of the regional order, one in which the spectrum of cooperation would include economic and security issues, as well as water, tourism and refugees.

For Israel, the objectives of conferences such as MENA III were clearly laid out during the 1994 Casablanca summit. It became clear, wanted to convince Arab and foreign investors to channel their capital into the Middle East. The primary focus of this drive was to attract Arab investments, preferably in the form of joint projects. With this aim in mind, Israel found it necessary to work to normalise economic and cultural relations with the Arab countries while, simultaneously, reinforcing its concepts of Israeli "security" and "supremacy".

Egypt's objectives during the Casablanca conference, however, were to focus on a comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the Egyptian perspective, this meant that regional cooperation could not be got off the ground without a full and just peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Among the recommendations presented at the Casablanca conference were the establishment of the Middle East Regional Development Bank and the Middle East Travel and Tourism Association (MENTTA), both of which are currently under way. Another recommendation was for the establishment of a regional chamber of commerce and a re-

gional business council. The latter, however, has encountered some obstacles that have impeded its formation. A fourth recommendation was to reinforce the principles of partnership and cooperation between the private sectors and the governments of the region. The most significant outcome of the conference was the acknowledgment of the new regional role Israel would be expected to play in the Arab world.

The next economic conference, which was held in Amman in 1995, witnessed several changes. Prior to it the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani published a poem entitled "The Scouring Ones", in which he criticised those Arabs who hastened to make generous offers and propose economic agreements with Israel before any resolution was reached on the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the Golan and South Lebanon. He was, in effect, arguing that the economic pressure which could have been used as leverage to force Israel to withdraw from the Golan and South Lebanon, vanished into thin air thanks to the Arabs themselves.

On this issue, Egypt advised caution — the belief being that speeding up economic normalisation was not desirable, at least until the question of Israel's occupation of Arab territories was resolved. Jordan, on the other hand, favoured securing the maximum possible economic gain out of the peace it had recently signed with Israel.

Ironically, while Jordan's King Hussein was commenting that Egypt was the first Arab country to rush into peace with Israel, he was ignoring that Jordan had turned a blind eye to the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's pre-Amman conference declaration that Jerusalem was the eternal

and undivided capital of Israel. The US supported this declaration, and the Congress approved the transfer of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem no later than 1999.

Although this policy was in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions which declare that Jerusalem is part of the occupied Arab territories, the US and Israel embraced their stance wholeheartedly, fully confident that any Arab reaction would be futile.

This tension was evident during the Amman conference, which ultimately served to reflect the discord in the positions of the various Arab nations. Some countries, such as Jordan and a few of the Gulf states, adopted the view that the time was right to cash in on the economic gains to be had, as a way of recouping some of the losses from war and foreign occupation. Others, however, remained steadfast in their conviction that economic cooperation should complement the peace process, and not be used to pressure any Arab state to yield to arbitrary Israeli demands.

But political turmoil aside, several projects grew out of the Amman conference, such projects included one for the "Red Sea River", near Ras Bassa which brought together Egypt, Israel and Jordan, and a free zone project on the Egyptian-Israeli border. But, most of these projects were more beneficial to Israel than to its Arab partners.

Projects whose outcome would promote the development of Arab economies, such as Egypt's proposed agricultural projects, Palestinian industrial projects and Jordanian Dead Sea mineral projects, however, have not made headway.

The disappointing results of these projects

were underscored by the fact that Amman's sole achievement was the establishment of a regional bank, the regional tourist agency and the business council.

The Middle East Regional Development Bank project was the one product of Amman that brought to the foreground a great number of contradictions. While the bank's capital, at first, was set at \$25 billion, it was gradually reduced to \$5 billion. To date, however, only \$1.25 billion has been agreed upon.

The industrialised European nations should have transferred 60 per cent of the original \$5 billion, but Germany, and later the European Union, rejected the idea of contributing to the establishment of a bank they believed would be a US-controlled political pawn. Europe's opposition to the idea of the bank began to gather momentum during the evening session of the first day of the conference.

During a press conference, France's Minister of Industry Yves Gallen, said that France would not take part in this project and it was waiting for the next regional economic conference when it would evaluate how well the project had fared.

Meanwhile, Gunter Rickhofs, the German minister of economy, emphasised that this bank was, in fact, simply an unrealistic project and was an example of the US "showing off". The bank, he said, would not live long.

To compound matters, the remaining 40 per cent, which was to be raised by the Gulf states, was not forthcoming. Saudi Arabia rejected the idea of the bank due to the existence of other Arab banks and funds which can be expanded to provide the same ser-

vices as those of the proposed bank. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, as a result of the Gulf War, was shouldering a sizable debt at the time. Following Saudi Arabia's lead, the other Gulf states, with the exception of Qatar, objected to the bank's credit system and demanded an extension of soft loans with lower interest rates.

In practice, this bank will not differ from other commercial banks and, as a result, its mechanisms will serve Arab-Israeli joint ventures. Moreover, the US's aim behind this bank is quite clear: namely to bring to an end the Arab boycott of Israel and normalise relations between the two sides.

Conditions for the bank's establishment stipulated that all transactions be undertaken only with the private sector. This stipulation would, in turn, strengthen the position of the Israeli private sector which is already stronger than its Arab counterparts. It would also allow the Israeli private sector to impose its full control on the markets. And Israel, suffering as a result of the Arab boycott, would, after the establishment of the bank, have access to Arab financial resources.

Arguably, one can conclude that the main outcome of the Amman conference was the redistribution of Arab wealth between the Arabs and Israel. This was accomplished through redirecting Arab resources to develop the Israeli economy by financing projects presented by Israel to the conference.

During this conference, Israel's agenda revolved around a form of economic cooperation independent of the peace process. It proposed a total of 162 projects valued at \$25.3 billion. Egypt, on the other hand, presented 85 large-scale investment enterprises

valued at LE25 billion (\$7.35 billion).

The Israeli project blueprint was composed of 260 pages, including proposals for regional cooperation projects within the framework of the Mediterranean countries, as well as graphs, maps and the anticipated cost of those projects.

The portfolio also included research on the current economic conditions of the countries expected to join the new regional order as envisaged by Israel. The document specified that the final aim of the Amman conference, was primarily establishing a regional grouping of Mediterranean countries with a common market and an elected central authority similar to that of the European Economic Community (EEC). In order to realise this objective, Israel recommended that bilateral and multi-lateral projects in the fields of desert research and desalination, should be undertaken. Major international financial institutions would implement ventures requiring huge capital, under the supervision of the countries concerned.

The final stage of realising its objective would be the formation of the new regional order and the gradual development of its official institutions. One of the important points raised by Israel, in this context, is the reduction of the region's military expenditure by one-third or one-half in order to save \$20 billion annually and to finance projects in the new regional order.

It was suggested that the oil-producing countries of the Gulf also contribute one per cent of their oil revenue for the same purpose, as well as for the establishment of the Middle East bank. The Israeli plan, however, stressed that these moves would not affect international oil prices.

Market report

FOLLOWING a four-week slump, the capital market got a much-needed boost, with its index gaining 1.35 points to close at 234.02 for the week ending 24 October. To a great extent, the rebound is due to the overcoming of glitches in the new clearing and settlement system that was installed nearly one month ago. The Capital Market Authority's chairman, Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim, announced last week that all the previously-suspended transactions were successfully completed.

In the manufacturing sector, shares of the

Alexandria Portland Cement Company gained LE49.25 to close at 472, while those of the Middle and West Delta Mills company inched up by LE3 to close at LE55.5. Shares of the South Cairo and Giza Mills and Bakeries gained LE1 to level off at LE32.5, while trading in shares of the paper Egypt Mills Company accounted for 14.07 per cent of total trading. While 321,965 shares of the company changed hands, they nonetheless closed at LE106.25, LE2.75 lower than their opening price.

Other manufacturing sector companies re-

Back on track

alised sizable gains in terms of their share value. Shares of the Medinat Nasr Housing and Development gained LE29.5 per share to close at LE185, while those of the Heliopolis Housing and Development Company gained LE22.15 to close at LE133.75. Recording a 50 per cent increase, shares of the Salama Housing and Contractors Company closed at LE15, while those of the Cairo Housing and Development Company lost 13.76 per cent of their opening value to close at LE12.

The financial and real estate sector's index

fared well during the week, gaining 6.78 points to close at 297.01 mainly as a result of an increase in the share value of 10 of the sector's companies. Shares of the Nationale Societe Generale Bank gained LE60 per share to close at LE568. The Credit International Bank was the market's shining star for the week, trading LE26.9 million in shares for a total of 18.07 per cent of total market turnover.

In all, the shares of 26 companies increased in value, 28 decreased and 35 remained unchanged.

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Reform for reform's sake

A LECTURE organised last week by the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies (ECES) stressed the importance of legislative reforms as part of ensuring the success of the country's economic reform programme.

Entitled, "The Legislative Framework for Economic Reform in Egypt", the lecture was given by Ibrahim Shihata of the World Bank. Shihata pointed out that the full effect of the economic reform programme will only be realised in full if accompanied by reforms in all the sectors, with particular emphasis on the legislative and legal branch. He added that legal reform includes drawing up laws and regulations that address and secure the needs of the market. As such, these reforms should also be extended into the executive branch of the government to ensure that the laws are effectively and fairly carried out.

In Egypt, he said, the prevalence of cumbersome red-tape in the form of inefficient rules and regulations causes confusion among potential investors and businessmen. The members of the business community, he argued, have repeatedly complained of the high cost of filing suits and the lengthy litigation procedures required before a verdict is handed down.

Shihata said he believes that the Egyptian Constitution must be amended, especially since it has a socialist bias which conflicts with the spirit of the economic reform programme. The Constitution, he suggested, should be neutral when it comes to economic issues since such policies may change from one government to another.

Environment-friendly grant

TWO EGYPTIAN-German agreements were recently signed in Cairo between five Egyptian commercial banks, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and the German Bank for Reconstruction and Development (KfW). The two agreements stipulate that Germany will provide Egypt with a DM56 million (roughly LE123 million) grant in an effort to promote financial cooperation between the two countries.

The bulk of the grant, nearly DM50 million, will be invested in the purchase of environmental protection equipment, pollution-prevention projects and industrial waste treatment plants for public sector factories. The rest of the grant money will go to the EEAA for the financing of expenses, studies and consultations related to the main project.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Le privé entre à l'université

Suez 56

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مكتزا من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

At precisely 2.35pm on Friday 15 June 1901, the era of *Al-Ahram*'s founding generation drew to a close. At this point in its long history, *Al-Ahram* had almost completed its first quarter of a century since it first appeared on 5 August 1876. Thus on the threshold of the silver jubilee, Bichara Tagla passed away, nine years after his brother and co-founder, Salim Tagla, who died on 8 August 1892.

Although it was Salim who had taken the initiative in founding *Al-Ahram*, we believe that of the two founders, Bichara was the more important. This is not merely a question of titles. Bichara having been awarded the rank of pasha while Salim had only attained the rank of Bek. There were many other reasons for Bichara's greater importance.

To begin with, Bichara had been present in a position of responsibility throughout this entire period in the newspaper's life, an opportunity that Salim had deprived his brother from. Thus, Bichara had served the newspaper in partnership with his brother and afterwards in his individual capacity. Very early on in *Al-Ahram*'s career, an article published in 1879 about the plight of the Egyptian peasant incurred the wrath of the Khedive Ismail, and it was Bichara who paid the price. He spent three days in prison until he was released by the French consul-general while his brother had fled the wrath of the Khedive by seeking asylum in the Russian consulate.

The newspaper almost met an untimely death on another occasion. This was three years later in 1882 with the outbreak of the Arabi revolution when the antagonism between the Arabi revolutionaries and *Al-Ahram* became too heated for the Tagla brothers. They decided to suspend publication temporarily, close their offices and head back to Lebanon. After the bombing of Alexandria and the withdrawal of the rebels, the Khedive Tawfiq, hurriedly in safety behind the British fleet, invited them back. It was Bichara who accepted the risk of returning to the smoldering pot to resume

publication of *Al-Ahram*, which at first consisted "of one page which he wrote by himself as he sat with the Khedive and cooked his own food." It was only after the Arabi rebels had been finally defeated that Salim returned to Alexandria to rejoin his brother and resume publication of the newspaper in its original form.

Bichara, from the outset, was the more dynamic of the two founders. While Salim focused on the more run-of-the-mill administrative concerns as well as his editorial column, entitled "A Glimpse", Bichara pursued schemes for the newspaper's enhancement and expansion. It was his idea to publish a daily supplement to *Al-Ahram*. The supplement, named *Echo*, began publication on 9 September 1876, a timing which opened the door for the stock exchange to subscribe to *Al-Ahram*. The daily coverage of the stock market in turn attracted, not only more subscribers, but advertisements which have continued to pump new life into the newspaper until today.

Also, beginning in January 1877, Bichara introduced a service unknown in the Egyptian press before that date. This, as was reported in the newspaper's obituary of its owner and editor-in-chief on the day of his death, was "to translate the wire-releases and distribute them to the newspaper's subscribers twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The press stayed in operation day and night in order to keep our readers abreast of the latest news, hour by hour."

Bichara was also the instigator of some of the newspaper's own investigative reporting abroad. It was his initiative to undertake tours of European capitals to provide first-hand coverage of some of the most crucial political events. His published obituary said: "In 1884, he travelled to London in order to attend the conference concerning the solution of the Egyptian question. He was tireless in his efforts to meet with ministers, ambassadors and delegates for the sake of the Egyptian cause."

These European tours, which appear to

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"If you sense that a word you might write will cause a person to lose a plastre, even if it will reap thousands for *Al-Ahram*, do not write it," Bichara Tagla, *Al-Ahram*'s co-founder and editor-in-chief told a group of reporters. He spoke shortly before he died in 1901, the year of the newspaper's silver jubilee. Bichara pioneered many innovations, including a twice-daily foreign news update for subscribers and the establishment of a French-language twin for the Arabic *Al-Ahram*. In this instalment of his Diwan chronicles, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells how instrumental Bichara was in laying the foundations of what is today the Arab world's largest and most prestigious press establishment

have been undertaken periodically, were to affect his personal life as much as that of *Al-Ahram*'s readers. Indeed, it was on one such tour that he met his future wife. His engagement took place on 15 June 1889 and he died on 15 June 1901.

Egyptian public opinion clearly considered Bichara's European tours as a service to the nation. Upon his return from his 1884 tour at the height of negotiations on the Egyptian question, a delegation from the Shura Legislative Council called at the offices of *Al-Ahram* to present to Bichara Tagla a gold watch upon which had been inscribed, "*Al-Ahram* - a national emblem". The watch was accompanied by a letter in which the parliamentary members expressed their gratitude for the services Bichara Tagla performed for the nation through *Al-Ahram*.

It was in his capacity as owner and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* that Bichara Tagla won his titles, first Bek, and then pasha. These were conferred on him directly by the Supreme Porte in Istanbul. It was no arduous task for Bichara to assume the ad-

ministration and editorship of the newspaper in the wake of his brother's death in 1892. Indeed, the transition was quite smooth in that it marked only a second phase of the newspaper's founding, towards which Bichara had made the largest contribution.

Al-Ahram's continued success had much to do with the way in which Bichara Tagla responded to the many changes Egypt underwent during the last decade of the 19th century. The most significant development in terms of Egyptian history was the evident intention of the British to prolong their occupation, at the same time the succession of 'Abbas II as the Khedive at the outset of that decade inspired a growing spirit of anti-British resistance. In the on-going conflict between the Khedival palace and the headquarters of the British High Commissioner, the country's newspapers constituted one of the protagonists' major instruments. There was no middle ground. Bichara had to choose sides and he opted for the nationalist camp championed by the young Khedive. *Al-Ahram* under Bichara thus waged sev-

eral battles against the British, focusing primarily on two areas of British policy: the occupation's attempt to consolidate its control over the Egyptian government administration and the expedition to conquer Sudan to establish British control over that sprawling territory at Egypt's expense.

In terms of the administration of the newspaper, *Al-Ahram* saw two major turning points that would effect its life as a national institution. The first, we believe, was fundamental to the newspaper's longevity; the second was instrumental in establishing a tradition that continues until today.

The first turning point occurred in November 1899. This date marks the move of *Al-Ahram*'s headquarters from Alexandria to Cairo. This was not merely to be closer to the pulse of events in the capital. Bichara, in taking this decision, must have determined that the future well-being of the newspaper depended on its being totally Egyptian in character. By moving from Alexandria, its birthplace, to Cairo, the editor-in-chief severed the last remaining ties with his original homeland in Lebanon.

As for the second turning point, this was the publication of *Al-Ahram*'s first Arabic supplement. With the inauguration of *La Pyramide*, Bichara began to direct the operations of two newspapers, setting the precedent which the *Al-Ahram* institution continues to follow today.

Directly or indirectly, the newspapers that featured obituaries of Bichara Tagla, regardless of their political positions, agreed on two points. The first was that he had demonstrated a reverence for his profession that was rare among those engaged in this field. The second was that *Al-Ahram* had made Bichara a very wealthy man. Bichara, as most of the newspapers that commemorated him agreed, was a scrupulous manager of his newspaper's finances. Money would not be squandered, but it would be funneled, and generously when possible, into the essentials: renovating the printing presses, hiring correspondents in Egypt and abroad, and investigative tours

abroad for himself or other correspondents. In short, Bichara's attitude towards his newspaper was that of any sensible entrepreneur who knows he must invest cleverly in order to reap a profit. Perhaps one of the reasons other contemporary newspapers were so short-lived was that their owners lacked this solid business sense.

There can be no doubt about his entrepreneurship. Everything that was written about the man in the wake of his untimely death (he was only 48 when he died) confirms that the newspaper owes to him the inception of the traditions that would guide the operations of *Al-Ahram* in later years. The first edition of the newspaper after his death contained his legacy to *Al-Ahram*'s writers. It was during his final bout of illness that he counselled, "Write in the pursuit of those subjects that are of purpose to this nation. In the service of the truth, fear no one. Avoid slander and turn a deaf ear to abuse, even if it is directed against myself." A subsequent section of the obituary contains the testimony of one of Bichara's closest friends and associates, Nikola Bok Toma, who said that he was present when Bichara told a group of *Al-Ahram* writers, "If you sense that a word you might write will cause a person to lose a plastre, even if it will reap thousands for *Al-Ahram*, do not write it, even if the newspaper were to lose many times the amount it might have gained. Bear in mind that the Orient is our native home and to it we devote our services."

Given his "greater share" in the establishment of the newspaper, his impressive stature in the world of journalism, the dynamism with which he steered the newspaper, it is little wonder that his sudden death would come as a great shock to all, regardless of their attitudes toward his editorial positions.

The author is a professor of history and head of *Al-Ahram* History Studies Centre.



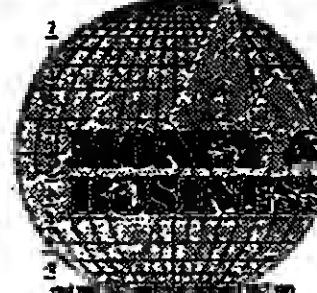
NBE to finance Chevening grants

IN LINE with its pivotal role in encouraging higher education in Egypt, an agreement has been signed between the National Bank of Egypt, the British Embassy and the British Cultural Centre which will grant scholarships for study at the masters' level at British universities.

NBE will fund £7500 of the total £15,000 scholarship, covering tuition for one year, residential fees, expenses, and travel tickets.

The granting authority has agreed to limit the subject of the masters' degree to banking, in order to develop the capabilities of employees in this field. The bank will participate in the selection process along with the British Cultural Centre.

MONEY & BUSINESS



High turnout for Systems 96

THE GENERAL manager of Munich Exhibitions, Joachim Enßlin, said that more than 1731 telecommunications and information technology companies took part in the Systems 96 exhibition, which was held 21-25 October. Ten thousand visitors visited the exhibition, one of the most widely-known exhibitions in Europe.

Visitor and participant turnout to the seminars and panels were high. Ernst Kick, manager of Systems 96, said that the exhibition was one of the most successful exhibitions organised in Europe, where it is a meeting place for many professionals in the area of communications and information technology. Nearly 75 per cent

of the decision-makers attend Systems to learn about the latest technological developments in the field.

Systems 97 will be held from 27-31 October and will focus on providing solutions for communication problems.

Enßlin said that the new exhibitions authority will be inaugurated in 1998, which

(L-R) Otto Winkler, minister of telecommunications and transport, Bavaria, and his wife; Karoly Lato, minister of transport and communications, and his wife and Manfred Watzelshofer, chairman of the board of Munich Exhibition, during the opening celebrations for Systems 96. Joachim Enßlin, general manager of Munich Exhibitions. Ernst Kick, manager of Systems 96.

will allow many international exhibitions to be held.

For more information on Systems 97, contact Mrs. Heba Azer from the German Chamber of Commerce at 341300214.

From Munich:
Mohamed Youssef Habib

Egyptian-Chinese Bank approved

The Egyptian-Chinese Committee held in Beijing from 24-29 October discussed the establishment of an Egyptian-Chinese bank that's expected to boost trade and eliminate obstacles related to financing between the two countries, said Rushdi Sakr, head of the International Committee of Exhibitions and Markets.

Sakr added that the Chinese side agreed in principle on establishing the bank which will play a prominent role in increasing transactions between Egyptian and Chinese companies. He concluded his statement saying that the Egyptian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce will discuss means of increasing trade between the two countries.

Trade with China

AHMED Guweili, minister of trade, met with Chinese Prime Minister Jiang Zemin, who hailed the ongoing progress achieved in the economic field. Zemin stated that he is looking forward to meeting Egyptian Prime Minister Kamel El-Gharzouli to discuss means of upgrading commercial exchange.

During his meeting with the Chinese prime minister, Guweili reviewed the works of the Egyptian Chinese Committee and the consultations made with Chinese ministers. At the heart of the discussion was the economic reform programme in Egypt which has borne fruits in bringing down inflation and increasing foreign currency.

These measures encouraged indebted countries to write off \$4 billion, which testifies to the seriousness of economic reform in Egypt.

Guweili stated in a press conference in Beijing that the possibility of transferring Chinese technology to Egypt was being examined through cooperation in the fields of petrochemicals, textiles, pharmaceuticals and fertilisers.

Guweili also stated that the conference centre in Nasr City is an example of Chinese-Egyptian cooperation, which can be seen in the financial and technical assistance it provides Egypt.

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Meridien Sharm El-Sheikh: Fruits of Saudi-Egyptian investment

A management contract for the Meridien of Sharm El-Sheikh was signed by Saudi Investor Sobhi Al-Khodari and his partners representing Tirana Tourism Investment and the representative of Meridien International, Gerald Lawless, managing director of Forte Meridien Hotels Middle East.

Al-Khodari, general manager of the project, said that the hotel is situated overlooking Tiran Island,



Sobhi Al-Khodari

the most beautiful site in the area. In choosing the site, special consideration was given to Meridien International due to the fine reputation it enjoys.

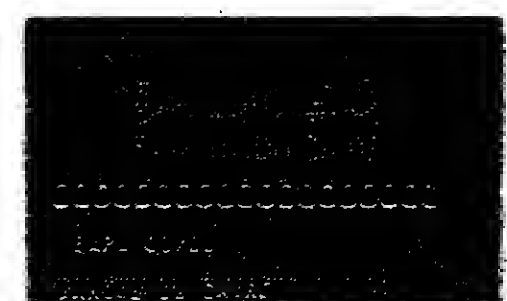
The hotel includes 285 rooms exclusively designed and fully equipped with panoramic terraces, in addition to 20 villas consisting of 2 floors which includes 3 bedrooms, a reception room, dining room, 3 bathrooms, a kitchenette and a terrace with a total area of 200m. The hotel includes a diving centre and conference and convention facilities.

The hotel is located 5km from Neama Bay and 2km from Sharm El-Sheikh airport. The hotel will open in 1998 with the luxurious sophisticated refinement of Le Meridien French style to be part of the largest tourism-oriented zone in Egypt.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Boot camps

With US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross now back in Washington after three weeks of mediation between Palestinians and Israelis on the seemingly mythical Hebron troop redeployment, US officials remain optimistic that the issue will be resolved within a month.

But for 12-year-old Helmi Shawash, who lies in his grave after "allegedly" being pistol-whipped by a Jewish settler, optimism is no longer an option. Helmi, and more likely than not, his sister who has leukemia, have discovered the hard way that when it comes to Jewish racism and an absolute disregard for the value of human life and dignity, few can match with the roughly 400 extremist settlers residing in Hebron, and their erstwhile leader-of-forts, Benjamin Netanyahu.

While Netanyahu is quick to accuse the Palestinians of dragging out the issue, his fellow right-wingers are mustering up the courage to defend themselves against other 12-year-olds who may be wielding stones. And yet, Netanyahu is concerned about their safety. So much so, in fact, that Israeli troops once again fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds at crowds of stone-throwing Palestinian youths mourning the death of a child.

While tragic, Helmi's death is unsurprisingly representative of the hypocritical tone and text the peace process has assumed over the last few months. Arguing that he is not bound to agreements reached by the previous Labour government, Netanyahu has approved the construction of another 8,200 settlement homes for Jews. His explanation was that it was a move approved by the previous administration, but had been frozen. Other examples of this brand of hypocrisy abound.

The most striking idiosyncrasy of this duplicity is that Israelis are blind to the fact that it is occurring. They speak of the value of human life based on their Holocaust experience, and yet the latest fashion craze in the country are Nazi-style boots. In this light, one is forced to wonder what kind of boots Helmi's killer was wearing when he stepped on the child's throat. And what kind of boots will Netanyahu be wearing when he takes that final, decisive step onto the heart of the peace process.

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAH, Al-Ghala St. Cairo.
Telephone: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 2018593346 Fax: 5786126/5786333

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atif El-Ghannam, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1256, 329 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202) 771-2121/2122.
New York: Atif El-Ghannam, Al-Ahram Office, 396 H. Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212) 672-6440; Telex: 497 9406 UTA; Fax: (212) 286 0235.
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Russia

Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Al-Ahram Office, Koltzovskiy Pr Dom 7/4 Kv. 30, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/230 2879; Fax: 230 2879
Telex: 13467 Kallim

Canada

Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Side 2440, Montreal H3B 2X3, Quebec; Tel: (514) 876 7823 Fax: (514) 876 7823

United Kingdom

London: Amr Abdel-Samir, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street, London NW1 2NU
Tel: 0171 388 1155; Fax: 0171 388 3130

France

Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 7200; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-9363.

Germany

Frankfurt: Mohamed Elissa El-Shukrawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt; Tel: (069) 971-6309 (069) 971-6381 Fax: (069) 729771.

Austria

Vienna: Mustafa Abdallah, 2331 Voseodorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692669 0490; Telex: 11 2726 GIG A; Telex: 692669.

Greece

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Japan

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On course and moving ahead

Recent indicators paint a rosy picture of Egypt's economic prospects which the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference will only enhance, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**



economic reform, the time has come for Egypt to focus on the future. And all the indications are in place that that future will be a brighter time for Egyptians, indeed for all Arabs.

Egypt has entered a period of unprecedented stability. After five years of continuous reform the economy is well placed for expansion. The budget deficit has been dramatically reduced to one per cent of GDP, as opposed to 20 per cent at the beginning of the eighties. At the same time the annual rate of inflation has dropped to less than eight per cent, while the exchange rate has been steady for four years despite the deregulation of markets. The balance of current transactions produced a surplus of \$630 million in 1994-1995, exceeding IMF predictions. Foreign currency reserves have reached \$18.5 billion, which covers import costs for one and a half years, the highest reserve/import ratio in the developing world.

Such economic indicators will prove a great incentive to investors. What we need now, though, is to furnish investors with the best possible climate.

Investment will underpin economic growth which, over the next few years should exceed eight per cent.

In the past Egypt has been hampered by a paucity of domestic savings to finance the investment necessary to stimulate growth. Hence the importance of the conference which will provide an important shop window in which to display Egypt's unsurpassed advantages to the foreign investor.

Up till now direct foreign investments have been limited. Of the \$90 billion of direct investment in the developing world last year the Middle East and North Africa attracted barely \$2 billion. But the successful implementation of the Prime Minister El-Ghazouli of policies conducive to growth will prove of great help in attracting an increased share of direct investment.

The success of the privatisation programme is already reflected in the increased volume of trade on the stock market. In July transactions involving foreign investors accounted for almost 69 per cent

of the total, a clear demonstration of increased international confidence in Egypt as one of the fastest developing financial markets.

The government is keen to increase levels of investment in the Egyptian economy both domestically, regionally and internationally. To facilitate an enhanced climate for investment customs and taxation procedures have been streamlined. The government is also planning further reforms. Its legislative programme includes investment incentives which, in addition to preserving incentives already in place will be expanded to encourage new investments away from the Nile Valley. The proposed law for investment incentives — the unified investment law, as it has been termed — will also contain performance related incentives conditional on achieving certain targets in specified areas, eg. exports. The law will also include provisions to allow preferential treatment to be accorded to labour intensive projects or projects likely to involve significant technological transfers.

The proposed law thus represents a continuation of policies concerned not just with the narrow parameters of finance, but which seek to encourage comprehensive development.

Can we honestly expect that Egypt will successfully secure a future for its people just to play into the hands of those who would like to see Egypt flounder in the economic crises of its past, leaving it prey to pressures from abroad? Egypt's comprehensive and strategic vision, which has already resulted in a series of positive steps forward backed by solid indicators, are proof enough of Egypt's determination to progress in the face of machinations from some quarters to derail that advance. Egypt knows that only when it is politically, militarily and economically strong and independent will it be able to protect the just and lasting peace that is in the interests of all people in the region.

On selective boycott

Arguing that the indiscriminate Arab boycott of all Israelis can prove to be counter-productive with Netanyahu in power, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** proposes an alternative strategy

For many years Dr Latifa El-Zayat, who recently passed away, headed The Egyptian Committee in Defence of Pan-Arab Culture, a group of intellectuals firmly opposed to Zionism and to the normalisation of relations with Israel. In rigorously maintaining a uncompromising stand on the issue, the committee's members were certainly acting from the highest motives. But rigour in such matters can sometimes be closer to ethics and metaphysics than to politics, which is aptly described as the "art of the possible", or, alternatively, as the "least bad option". And that is where I came to differ with them. These differences came to a head during a debate organised by the Committee last week at the Journalists Syndicate, which was attended by a wide spectrum of opposition forces.

I have always argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict has a specific character of its own, if only because one main protagonist, Israel, has not always existed as a state in the region. In the case of France and Germany, for example, conflict between them arose over disputed areas, such as Alsace-Lorraine, or over which was better qualified to lead Europe, but never over the right of the other to exist. There are no precedents to back the assertion that Arab parties must accept as legitimate the creation of a Jewish state in their midst. Peace with Israel is bound to appear to their eyes as a 'concession' with no counterpart, in other words, as simple surrender.

For Israel to convince them that this understanding of peace is false, it will have to prove, by deeds and not by words, that its presence in the region can be more advantageous to them than its absence — a difficult proposition given that the very essence of Zionism is to place the fate of the "chosen people" above that of any other.

It is therefore understandable that the creation of Israel has driven its citizens to adopt two contradictory schools of strategic thought: Netanyahu's, which considers that peace is impossible and that the status quo can only be sustained through military deterrence and superiority; and Peres', which believes that in a predictable post-bipolar world 'order', incentives (notably, a Middle East market), and not only deterrence, are necessary to sustain peace on Israel's terms.

Accordingly, peace has no established definition in the specific conditions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arbitrary formulas have been devised, such as the 'land-for-peace' formula now generally attributed to Security Council Resolution 242. However, it is not clear what is meant by land here. Is it the land lying within the borders established in the 1947 UN partition plan, within the post-'48 war boundaries, within the pre-'67 war boundaries or within the wider borders which resulted from Israel's 'withdrawal from territories' and not from the territories it occupied in '67? Nor, for that matter, is it clear what is meant by peace. Are we talking about a simple armistice along the lines of that which prevailed after '48, or a "peace" without diplomatic relations as before '67, or with full normalisation, as now required?

Despite the global attention lavished on the search for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly after the Madrid conference, all it has produced so far is the freezing of one contradiction, namely the one between Israel as a state on one hand, and the Arab states on the other, while all other contradictions, instead of being eliminated, have been displaced into the ranks of Israeli society and Arab societies respectively.

In the case of Israel, this displacement found its most dramatic expression in Rabin's assassination by an ultra-right-wing fanatic, and is further confirmed by the victory of Netanyahu's brand of extremism over Peres' more moderate line. However, thanks to its democratic institutions, Israel has been relatively successful in managing, if not altogether overcoming, its inner contradictions. This has not been the case in the Arab world, where peace has ended up transforming the main contradiction in the Middle East from confrontation between Arabs and Israelis into acute conflict within Arab ranks. Significantly, all agreements signed by Arab negotiators with Israel have been signed behind the backs of their fellow negotiating teams.

As matters now stand, the weakest link in Israel's armour since Netanyahu assumed power is in the political set-up within Israel itself, where less than 51 per cent of the electorate supports his ruling right-wing coalition. Successive Israeli governments have been very successful in playing on inter-Arab contradictions, but because the Arab parties tend to see the Zionist state as a monolithic whole, making no distinction between its different political trends, they hold back from playing on the often sharp divisions between those trends.

The time has come for Arab intellectuals to realise that as long as they continue to adopt an indiscriminate boycott strategy, extremists like Netanyahu will continue to enjoy the support of the majority of Israelis. For peace to become irreversible in the long run, commitments by governments alone are not enough. Netanyahu will invoke the boycott by the Arab intelligentsia to

support his argument that peace is no more than an armistice, a 'cold peace' made necessary only by the Arabs' inability to wage a 'hot war'.

One way of depriving Netanyahu of the support of a majority of Israelis would be to "reward" those of his countrymen who advocate peace — on lines acceptable to the Arab parties — and "punish" those who obstruct it. Such a selective boycott, as it were, will require difficult decisions on both sides. Israeli peace forces will have to accept not only the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state — which they already do — but also that its capital be in Jerusalem, that withdrawal from the Golan satisfy Syria's understanding of the land-for-peace trade-off, that Israel abandon its nuclear option, that it withdraw from South Lebanon, etc. Arab popular forces will also have to make difficult decisions, such as limiting the boycott to anti-peace Israelis, thus signalling that normalisation of relations is possible once ambiguities in the land-for-peace formula are removed. It goes without saying that the boycott should become selective only after Israeli peace forces openly commit themselves to upholding these Arab demands.

The danger here is that a selective boycott could encourage forces in the Arab world with a vested interest in doing business with the Israelis to push for a total lifting of the boycott. To avert this danger, criteria for dealing with Israelis will have to be established. I believe a national conference should be convened to debate how such a strategy can be implemented. In this domain, transparency, openness and accountability, in a word, *glasnost*, are indispensable to avoid entrapment and blackmail that could defeat the purpose of the strategy I propose.

The Press This Week

Akhbar El-Yom: "President Chirac's neutral stance should be welcomed by both sides [the Arabs and Israel]. It is what is expected, and acceptable, of a mediator, especially when that mediator is a great power such as France, which sides with neither party against the other, nor is it willing to support the aggressor against the victim, unlike what the world's first super power, the US, has accustomed us to." (Ibrahim Sa'ad, 26 October)

Al-Ahram: "The new world order, headed by the US, pulls most of the world behind it — but not France... President Chirac, who has shown great moral courage, has revived the importance of France and Europe in the Middle East peace process. His insistence on upholding agreements between the Arabs and the Israelis means that France refuses to be a silent witness to wolves devouring prey." (Ahmed Bahgat, 27 October)

Al-Arabia: "Chirac has come at the right time to say what no other Western leader would dare say... France's ambitions are great but its capabilities are limited and this is what Chirac is trying to change. But he cannot do this by himself, he needs the cooperation of the Arabs — if they have the will and the capability." (Galal Aref, 28 October)

Rose El-Youssef: "President Chirac has shown that there still are great world leaders who can stand up to Israeli arrogance and say 'no' in no uncertain terms to the spoiled brat the US. The admirable French position voiced by President Chirac during his visit to Arab Jerusalem and his declarations on peace and security in the Middle East have come as a surprise to the Egyptian public, long accustomed to hear only of world leaders' support for Israel or their silence over its shameful conduct." (Mahmoud El-Tohani, 28 October)

Al-Ahali: "Today's conditions are different from those of the '70s and Chirac is not Giscard d'Estaing or Mitterrand. He is more of a 'de Gaulle' and more aware of France's global role, particularly in the Arab world. He has called for a strong alliance between Damascus and Paris to serve bilateral interests, the Middle East and Europe. He has also frankly called for a European role in the peace negotiations between the Arabs and Israel and has supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Regardless of whether Israel

The Chirac factor

approves or disapproves, Chirac's statements are bound to meet with welcome from the Arab world and indeed Europe. All that is required is that these declarations be turned into action." (Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, 23 October)

Al-Gomhuriya: "There is no doubt that the idea of a European role is strongly welcomed by the parties to the peace process. Hopefully, Israel will revise its stance after having listened to new European ideas during Chirac's visit to the region and his statements on the true meaning of security and stability and the need to implement international resolutions and agreements on the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict." (Editorial, 27 October)

October: "In the final analysis, one can say that the European move may not be given a chance and that matters will remain as they are, with the peace process stalled. But the Arab-European diplomatic drive will certainly help to deliver a message to Israel and the US to the effect that the whole world now knows who is holding up the peace process and who does not want peace." (Saleh El-Fitani, 27 October)

Al-Shaab: "If it is only natural that the Arabs should be happy with a French (European) role that is different from the dominant US role in the region, they should naturally realise that the real problem is not so much the absence of a European role but the absence of a unified Arab stance. Without strong Arab movement, the European role can be of little benefit in competing with that of the pro-Israeli US." (Talaat Romaek, 23 October)

Al-Wafiq: "We can confidently say that not even Chirac himself, after his recent tour, expects that Europe should suddenly become a major mediator in the peace process. At best France will be in the limelight in the region. This is for many reasons — the first is Israel's refusal on the grounds that it would complicate matters. The second is the US's refusal to allow Europe a role once again in the region. Also, many Arab states do not believe in a European role in the peace process... Things could have been different had the Arabs adopted a unified stance." (Sanaa El-Said, 27 October)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**

City of art

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

Youssef Wahby's great performances, in plays such as *The Confessional* or *Rasputin*, attracted enormous crowds to the theatre, from the humblest members of society high up at the back of the auditorium to ministers and deputy ministers, beys and pashas in the best seats.

But for me his greatest achievement was the creation of an entire arts and entertainment complex located in the area now occupied by Sphinx Square in Mohandessin. It was a multi-media complex which went by the name Ramses City. There were theatrical productions, open air cinemas and pavilions for orchestral and choral performances.

The 'City' kept a strict eye on quality. Only the best was ever presented, including Youssef Wahby's own comedies. The cinemas would show the latest Egyptian and foreign films, while recitals would be given by Munira El-Mahdiya and Mohamed El-Araby. There were also a number of restaurants and coffee shops serving all manner of drinks.

The City charged one piastre for entry, with individual shows costing around two piastres, charges that even in those far off days were really no more than tokens, considering the exceptionally high standards of the place.

I used to visit the 'City' every summer, day after day, through all my university years. How useful such a project would be today, given the stagnation that appears to afflict all the arts.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salim.



The plight of the African child in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa hit the international headlines this week with hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing from the ethnic conflict zone of eastern Zaire. Children are often the most victimised segment of society during civil wars. There are child-soldiers, children who are captives and prisoners of war and victims of rape by soldiers. Children go hungry, have their education disrupted and are sometimes enslaved. I envisage the African child as an aged crone, all bone and holding an empty bowl while his tired gaze tells a tragic tale.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The trade in innocence

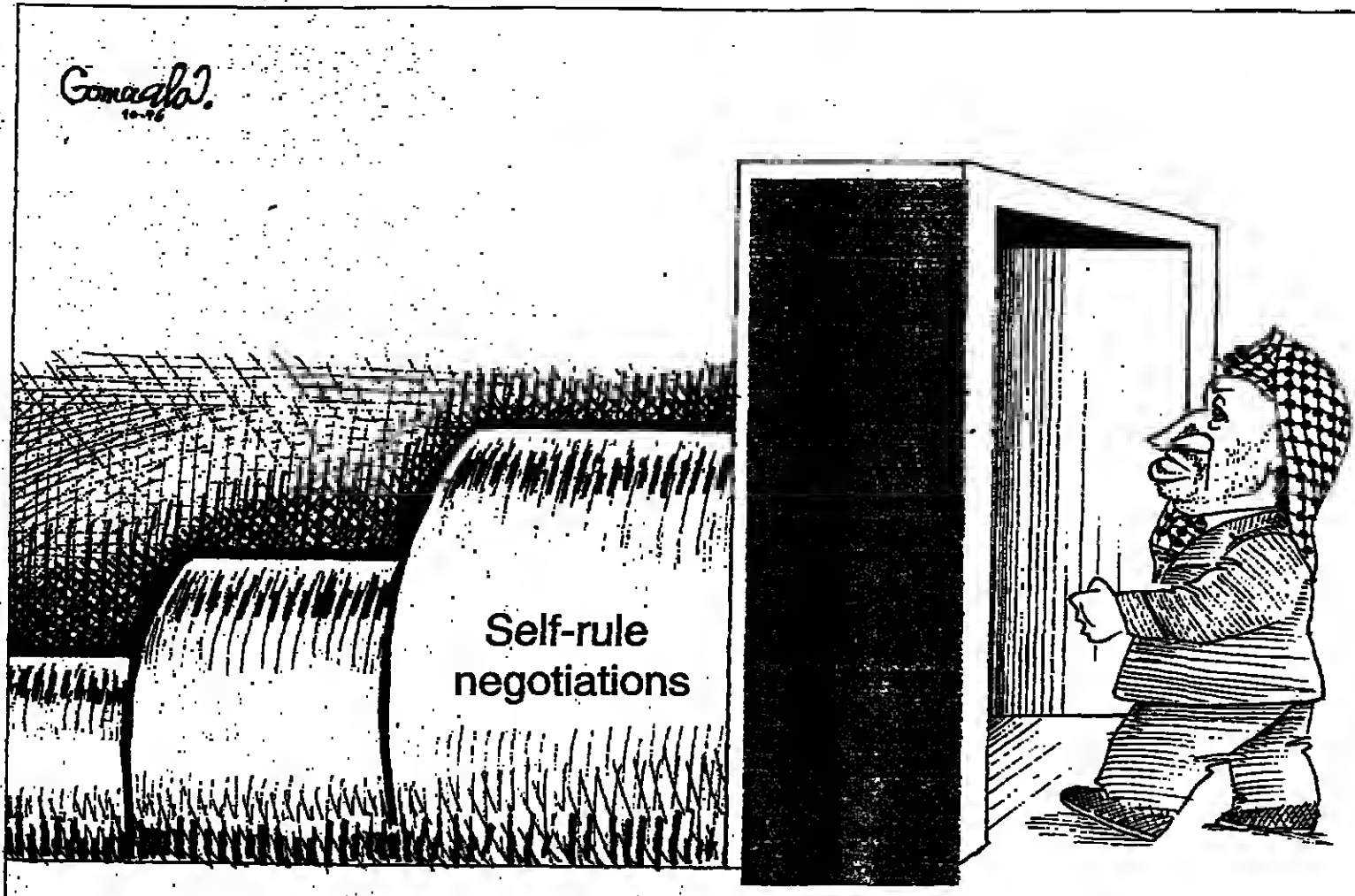
Trading in children for sexual purposes has reached unprecedented levels, and in Europe is attracting a great deal of press coverage. Those who follow European news on television cannot fail to be horrified by the harrowing reports of the sexual abuse of minors. The latest such crime, which sent shock waves well beyond national borders, concerned the discovery of the corpses of two children in a quiet Belgian town. The children, it transpired, were victims of a well-organised ring of child abusers.

Originally the trade in children was carried out under the respectable banner of wealthy but childless European and American couples adopting children of poor Asian or Latin American families. It quickly expanded, though, to procuring children for sexual purposes, and the trade rapidly became enmeshed with organised prostitution and international drug dealing.

The vast majority of the clientele making use of this criminal network are European men who seek their pleasure abroad, most commonly in Asia and Latin America. Under the guise of travel agencies, specialising in tours of extremely poor countries which either have no child protection legislation or which do not enforce the legislation which is in place, such people are able to arrange itineraries the sole purpose of which is to allow them to exploit the young and defenceless. Nor are there any statistics to register the number of victims of this trade, though in countries such as Brazil, Thailand, and the Philippines, the numbers of children forcibly involved in the sex trade could reach tens, if not hundreds, of thousands.

International conventions, ratified by the UN, generally address themselves to safeguarding children's rights to education and healthcare, and to protecting children from forced labour, usually in agricultural production or industrial projects. And while the rich industrial nations bring ever more pressure to bear on poorer developing nations — threatening them with GATT agreements to oblige them to stop using under-age labour, regardless of traditional social and economic customs within the family or tribal units — they have yet to formulate adequate deterrents capable of protecting children from sexual exploitation. It is now a matter of urgency that this issue be addressed. The conference that will be convened in Sweden offers perhaps the best platform for hammering out the required legislation.

And while religious and social norms may go some way towards protecting children from sexual abuse in the Arab world, this gives no reason for complacency. This matter cannot be neglected.



A three per cent solution

The facts are, writes Edward Said, that neither Israel nor the US has the slightest desire to foster a peace process that guarantees Palestinian self-determination or independent statehood. So what is left to be done?

Two principal themes in Arab and Palestinian discourse emerged during and after the recent crisis over the provocatively opened Jerusalem tunnel. One was the need to rally round the Palestinian National Authority, in its time of crisis with Netanyahu. The second was the even greater urgency of returning to the signed peace documents between the PLO and Israel.

Both are understandable reactions to a serious sense of great crisis and consternation. For without the Oslo Accords the Palestinian Authority would lose a great deal of its international legitimacy, as well as its internal coherence. Besides, it is natural in a time of what seems to have been a moment of extra arrogance by Israel, and after Palestinian lives had been lost, to speak passionately about laying down differences, setting aside inter-Palestinian quarrels, dropping all partisan politics to the interest of the common welfare. A former Democratic Front military leader, now living in Ramallah after a prolonged residence in Tunis, ventured the thought that it was almost immoral of intellectuals at this time to say anything that might be deemed contrary to the accepted consensus, especially after Palestinian martyrs had fallen to the national cause.

While I understand and to some extent sympathise with some of this, I must also say that I remain unconvinced by this whole line of reasoning. Certainly unity is a good thing, as is maintaining pressure on the Israelis, whose shameless and contemptible attitudes to Arabs and Palestinians have been the bane of the Middle East for five generations. But I must dissent, the thesis that we must all plunge ourselves headlessly into the seething, emotional turbulence of the present, without a thought, or lacking any clear ideas about why we are in this terrible state to begin with.

The condition of Arab and Palestinian politics today is desperate not because of an excess, but because of a poverty of reason and responsibility. Is it the intellectual's duty simply to become a member of the chorus, or is it more valuable to stand aside (which implies not detachment but, I think, a greater commitment to the common good) and reflect without undue emotion on why we are here, and how we can move forward? The answer for me is clear: critical thought is much more useful now than flag-waving, which I have always thought is one of the cheapest political tactics ever invented.

In its 14 October issue the influential American weekly magazine, *The New Yorker*, published a very long account of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in light of the impasse caused by Netanyahu's policies. The author is Connie Bruck, someone who has never before written about the Middle East, but whose work furnished readers with one of the most complete and intimate descriptions of what has been taking place. Yet it is also perfectly clear that despite her access to the substantial number of influential Palestinians whom she quotes (Abu Mazen, Abu Alaa who is her central source, Nabil Shaath, Mahmoud Darwish, Nasser Al-Qidwa, Hassan Asfour, among others) some of whom were directly involved in the negotiations with Israel, Bruck seems to be an ideological Labour Zionist. Throughout her article she gives one example af-

ter another — some of which I shall describe below — of how Peres literally cheated and bullied his Palestinian interlocutors, leaving them in the end with a pathetic patchwork of tiny autonomous regions that, she says, added up only to about three per cent of the land.

Yet she concludes her article by praising Rabin and Peres and Uri Savim, with whom she reports Abu Alaa established a "mystical" bond, as men of principle and courage. The Labour leaders, she said, had a "moral commitment" which nevertheless "extracted" concessions after concessions from the Palestinians, unquestionably overpowering them. Then in total contradiction with her own account she adds that the Israelis "did not see the Palestinians as a lesser order of being", whereas everything she talks about suggests that they did. "They did not see them as merely subjects for whom some small, spotty parcel... of their homeland should suffice," which is exactly what the Israelis did give the Palestinians, and exactly how they did (and continue) to see them.

I mention all this about Bruck in order first of all to show that even when confronted with evidence of their own research and selection, supporters of Israel can override that evidence and conclude that some Zionists are fine people, with a moral commitment. I recall feeling the same way when I first read Benny Morris's important book on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, in which Morris — also a liberal Israeli — gives example after example of the concerted Zionist plan to drive out the Palestinians in 1948. Yet he too concludes, inexplicably, that there was no real plan; only a series of incidents that were the results of a general war.

Be that as it may, Bruck's *New Yorker* article is important not because of its peculiar conclusions but because this is the first non-Arab and non-Palestinian account of the process from the American and Israeli point of view that confirms what I, and many other critics of the process, have been saying. The article deserves translation into Arabic for its details and accuracy, though here I can only give two or three examples of how the future of Palestine was negotiated. Bruck tells us that, according to Arafat's aides, the Palestinian leader probably never read the agreements, relying on his assistants (who gave him "a rosy picture" of the contents) or on a quick reading of the headings. Abu Mazen told Bruck that for several months after the Washington ceremonies Arafat did not realise that he was not getting a state, only autonomy. Furthermore, Arafat regularly intervened in the negotiations, making it easier for the Israelis to get concessions from him which his own people had already refused; the Norwegians were useful in this, and I must say, they emerge from Bruck's account as manipulative and slippery, as well as unreasonably pro-Israeli to what they did.

The Israeli plan, as formulated by the great Peres, was to "remake" and "transform" Arafat into a partner for the Israelis, so that he could make historically unpalatable concessions to them and remain as an instrument for implementing their schemes. Before the negotiations began in earnest an Israeli-American lawyer with years of international experience had

drafted the agreement in sixteen drafts; for their part, however, the Palestinians had done nothing. Bruck describes their woeful lack of preparation, their various cults of personality, and the duplicity of which they were victims, at the expense of their people of course.

The worst deception by the Israelis was in Oslo Two. Both sides had agreed not only on a schedule of re-deployment, but also on what percentage of the land held by Israel would be conceded to the Palestinians. The coordination of timetables and percentages over a period of several months gave the process a semblance of success for the Palestinians; although they began by getting autonomy in the main cities — 3 per cent of the whole — according to the schedule-percentage plan they would be getting about 70 per cent (some thought it was 80 per cent) of the West Bank. When the documents were drafted and ready for signature, Bruck says that the percentages had been eliminated unilaterally. But the furious Palestinians were forced to sign anyway. The fact, therefore, is that Peres, Begin, Savir and company had bamboozled the Palestinians, all the while posturing as serious men of peace when in fact they had treated the Palestinians as untutored savages who were entitled to the half a plot that Bruck unaccountably says was not to be their destiny.

It is essential to insist that Bruck writes as someone in favour of the peace process, by no means as a critic or opponent. She too longs for the days of Peres and his group, which is to say that they were plausibly ripping off the Palestinians, while the ruffian Netanyahu, who has more or less the same thing in mind, is less presentable, more embarrassing for supporters of Israel.

In view of the current crisis, therefore, it seems quite evident that a good deal of responsibility for the horrors of what the Palestinian people now endure at the hands of Israel is due to the negotiators, with Mr Arafat at the top. This leadership produced the hideous map of many Bantustans, they agreed to the settlements, they did not prepare, they lied (Bruck says that Arafat "always lied"), they accepted the plan without real timetables and percentages, they made the concessions, they in effect convinced with the Israelis to put forth what in reality was a travesty of peace, in which Palestinians got very little except the autonomy regime and the dubious privileges of running municipal affairs. Real power has remained in the hands of the Israelis: sovereignty, entrances and exits, security, Jerusalem, settlements, roads, water, 97 per cent of the West Bank.

To return to Oslo, which has been the central plea in official Palestinian discourse, is therefore to go back to the very situation that produced the mess we are in right now. During the 1921 Anglo-Irish negotiations, when Britain was the most powerful country in the world, the Irish resistance leaders Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera always said that their ultimate strength in dealing with the British was their people and their power of refusal.

Soapbox

Showcase for Egypt

MENA III — should it go ahead? This question has been asked repeatedly. My view has always been the same. Yes it should go ahead, for the simple reason that it is in the best interest of Egypt as well as the Arabs.

For 20 years Egypt has paid the price for peace and should now reap its harvest. The economic summit is, after all, an investment bazaar. Those Middle East and North African countries participating will be doing so in an attempt to attract potential investors. It is, therefore, the perfect forum for Egypt to promote its considerable and growing attractions to investors.

Egypt's economic reforms have resulted in low inflation, a modest budget deficit, and a strong balance of payments and reserve situation. MENA III will afford an opportunity to further capitalise on these successes. The potential of its market base will not be lost on investors, nor will the availability of a well-educated labour force. In addition, Egypt has abundant water and energy resources. Its rich industrial base allows for the implementation of complementary industrial projects. Egypt's industrial structure is much less specialised than that of Israel, which — though it is always presented as the supposed winner in regional economics — can claim supremacy in only a few industrial fields, namely electronics, arms and diamond cutting.

Most international trade and transport networks will have to start and/or pass through Egypt. Already the Suez Canal and the Sumed line provide important North-South trade axes. And as peace prevails Egypt will also find itself at the centre of the East-West, Africa-Asia axis.

So let us hold the November summit on time, the better to display the advantages of investing in Egypt.



Ali A Soliman

This week's Soapbox speaker is first undersecretary for Arab and African Cooperation at the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation.

The right regulatory balance: key to productivity

Regulatory reforms are viewed by many as a prerequisite of increased productivity in the private sector. Mohamed A El-Erian examines some of the lessons to be gleaned from recent international experiences

What guidelines are in place for regulatory reforms undertaken in the context of structural reform programmes? Do regulatory reforms simply imply deregulation? How does one strike the balance between over-regulation and under-regulation?

These and similar questions are on the minds of policy makers everywhere — in industrial and developing countries alike — as they seek to implement policies aimed at encouraging private sector investment, employment creation and production. Fortunately, we now possess sufficient international experience to help answer such questions and to provide insights into Egypt's own performance.

Regulatory reforms in industrial and developing countries have been guided by a simple but important principle: reforms should target a more investor-friendly regulatory environment. This implies clear regulations that are insulated, as much as possible, from ad hoc and discretionary implementation and a reduction in the red tape that businesses face in dealing with various regulatory agencies, leaving them more time to devote to genuine production, investment and employment decisions.

To be credible and effective, regulatory changes must also be viewed as fair. They should not discriminate in favour of certain groups — typically state-owned enterprises and the large and entrenched private sector firms.

The success of regulatory reforms then can be measured in

the degree of reassurance felt by domestic and foreign investors that they are operating, and will continue to operate, within a transparent and predictable framework where procedures are implemented fairly and systematically.

Regulatory reform, therefore, is not synonymous with deregulation. Rather, it means striking the right balance between the over-regulation and under-regulation of various sectors and activities or, as economists are fond of saying, between correcting for market failure and correcting for government failure.

Deregulation in certain areas must therefore be accompanied by regulatory strengthening in other areas, generally those characterised by market failures and by the need to provide an enabling environment for the proper functioning of competitive markets, which implies government action to prevent collusion and monopoly; to protect consumers, deter inside trading and ensure prudent regulation and supervision of financial markets.

Not surprisingly, regulatory reform has been especially important in the context of privatisation and liberalisation efforts. Simply put, it is important to ensure that natural monopolies and former government monopolies do not abuse their market power when transferred to the private sector.

While stressing the importance of regulatory reforms, one should not have unrealistic expectations about the immediacy

of the benefits. They take time to materialise. New Zealand is often cited as a classic example. The very fundamental reforms undertaken in the 1980s bore significant fruit only in the 1990s, when the New Zealand economy emerged as one of the world's top performers.

It is also important to recognise that regulatory reforms are not easy. Vested interests have a way of resisting and fighting back. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive programme guided by a clear vision, commanding political will and skilled and responsive enforcement.

Finally, regulatory reforms are not just a government thing. They involve the whole of society and must benefit from the input of the private sector. The private sector must also contribute in promoting, among its own ranks, the right type of self-regulation.

Where does Egypt stand in terms of some of these simple considerations? An economist cannot fail to notice the important changes that have taken place in recent years in the regulatory environment impacting on key economic activities.

Egypt now has transparent interest rates and foreign exchange markets which have been instrumental in stabilising the economy, reducing inflation and building up a strong foreign exchange cushion — all of which strengthen the environment for investment. The external payments system has been

liberalised, the investment approval and registration process simplified, and sectors previously off-bounds have been opened up to private participation.

These steps are all consistent with the right kind of deregulation. Egypt has also exerted efforts to strike the right balance with regard to regulation. The regulatory regime governing the financial sector has been strengthened through the many steps taken by the Central Bank of Egypt and, more recently, the Capital Market Authority.

On the whole Egypt has come a long way in escaping the regulatory imbalances that used to dominate economic activities. There remains, however, an unfinished policy agenda, as recognised by policy makers. Hence the significance of recent steps to strengthen the dialogue with the private sector, accelerate the privatisation programme, progress further with the rationalisation of investment incentives and procedures and continue with tax reform, including the improvement of tax administration. With further progress in these areas, Egypt can look forward to higher rates of investment, employment and growth.

The writer is deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department at the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the IMF.

**David
Blake**
gets all
wrapped up

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Speaking many tongues?

Understanding Arabic, ed Alaa El-Gibali; AUC Press, Cairo, 1996

Fifteen scholars, many of them well-known experts in linguistics, have — under the editorship of Professor Alaa El-Gibali — synthesised, criticised, and extended our understanding of Arabic in a volume that is, appropriately enough, dedicated to Professor El-Said Badawi.

"In Badawi," writes the editor of the present volume, "we have an Arab — motives indisputably genuine, ties to the classical heritage unrelenting and intimate, and proficiency in modern linguistics — who concedes the actuality and bona fide theoretical status of the colloquial varieties, the true native tongues of the Arab peoples."

The main thesis of the book is that it was never true that Arabic had been unchanging. The writers concur that Arabic has changed to the extent that we have different Arab languages. In other words, Arabic, like Latin, gave birth to French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Classical Arabic gave birth to Saudi, Egyptian, Tunisian, etc. What is more interesting is that the Egyptian language is now breaking up in to Cairene, Alexandrian, and so on. If this thesis is true then the book is in my view bona fide an Orientalist effort to destroy Arabic.

Michael Carter, in his paper, tries to present evidence of changes within the structure of Arabic in its spoken Egyptian form with special attention to those that may become permanent in the language as a whole. Emphasis is placed upon what seem to be spontaneous internal changes in the system, that is, changes that are not an obvious response to contact with other languages.

Kassem M. Wahba offers a study of the social stratification of Arabic in Alexandria. He takes Labov's study of the social stratification of English in New York to explain language variation in Arabic. He investigates variation of the spoken language in Alexandria, using a quantitative sociolinguistic methodology, and reports on how the modification of a phonemic variable such as emphasis is related to social differences among speakers in a diglossic community.

Benjamin Harry advances in his paper a model of a multi-glossic continuum in Arabic and shows how speakers shift along it according to several variables. He also reports on an experiment with Egyptian native speakers that points to the regularity of the varieties on the continuum, which may lead to the possibility of writing a unified grammar for all the varieties of Arabic.

Dionisius A. Agius discusses the Sicilian *jara'id* (registers) and their linguistic impact on Sicilian Arabic. These documents, covering the period from 1091 to 1266, provide information on estates and land property as well as on the inhabitants who worked for their lords in the allocated territories. They are mostly in Greek, though some are in Arabic or in parallel Arabic and Greek or Arabic and Latin. The data covers information on grain, vines, trees, woodlands, water rights, stock-raising, vegetable fibres, floral commodities, communications, and so on. The autographs found in these registers suggest how their bearers made their living.

The material does have defects: for the demographer it lacks data on sex ratios or age. In recent years, there has been a shift of focus in studying Arabic. Gone are the days when Arabs were considered Bedouins living in isolated deserts, their history reduced to what happened under the four Caliphs; in today's world the Arabs are an integral part of the international community, and so is the language they speak.

Kees Versteegh (Chapter 1) puts us on the right track as he investigates in depth the cyclical relationship of influence between attitudes towards the Arabic language and the formulation of Arab grammarians' theories about the origin of speech. Arabic, like any other natural language, has evolved throughout its long history, but its traditional prescriptive mode of study has remained relatively unchanged and has continued to dominate the investigation of the language for some 13 centuries. It has been perceived by Arabs and many Arabophiles and Arabologists as a language immune to change on account of its intimate link with Islam; consequently, new ideas, findings, and approaches of modern linguistics have been routinely dismissed as irrelevant.

Thus, in recent years, there has been a shift of focus from Teaching Arabic as an Foreign Language (TAFL) at the university level, at least in the West. Many stu-

dents, university administrators, and decision-makers have pushed for a change. They have argued for supplementing, if not replacing, the traditional philological programmes (where Arabic is taught either as a means for reading texts or as a linguistic system per se) with more communicative programmes, where the focus is not only on reading but also on speaking, listening and writing skills.

Students of Arabic sociolinguistics will always be obliged to Professor Badawi for his monumental study, *Mushtaqat al-Arabiyat* (The Dialects of Arabic), as a book that demonstrates as clearly as any why languages should be studied within the framework of their social and cultural context.

Badawi posits five levels in contemporary Egyptian Arabic, based on his study of the oral use of Arabic in the Egyptian media in the 1960s. Blanc had already defined five levels of style in a cross-dialectal situation (1960), but unlike Blanc, who defined his levels within a purely grammatical framework, Badawi does so sociolinguistically. Only after establishing his sociolinguistic levels does Badawi list the different linguistic features of each level — *fi sha al-huruf* — "Classical Arabic of the heritage", *fi sha al-aw* — "contemporary classical Arabic", *ammiyyat al-mushaqqaqin* — "colloquial of the educated", *ammiyyat al-mutamawwitin* — "colloquial of the enlightened", *ammiyyat al-samiyyin* — "colloquial of the illiterate".

Badawi emphasises that his analysis of oral Arabic in Egypt is based on sociolinguistic factors, since it predicts which level a group of people will use in certain situations. He claims that his levels are not real, that the dividing lines between them are imaginary, and that one cannot decide where a level starts and where it ends. He proposes the levels as a heuristic device to be used in the study of sociolinguistic and linguistic features. Yet by assigning linguistic characteristics to these levels, Badawi cannot escape the impression others draw that these specific levels do exist as neat categories. Furthermore, by assigning each level a name, Badawi is forced to draw a dividing line between the standard and the colloquial varieties.

The interaction between dialect and cultural elements is now more accessible with the *Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*, which goes beyond a mere listing of words by including speech genres and a mine of cultural information. Likewise, valuable ethnographic accounts of local cultures such as *Leah's Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* or Ahmed Amin's *Qasas Al-Asat wa-l-Haqiqat Al-Misriyya* can now be better correlated with partial dialect descriptions like Mahmoud Tirmour's *Al-Amthal Al-Misriyya* to enhance our understanding of the contemporary sociolinguistic experience.

One of the summing aspects of Arabic for the empirical linguist who takes real native speakers seriously is that most educated native speakers appear to reside in the middle of a diglossic continuum, rather than at either or both ends. It is difficult to find contemporary examples of "pure" colloquial, uninfluenced by the literary language or by Western modes of expression, and it is even more difficult to find examples of the pure literary language, further, as manifestations of the revolution, and of the shape and content of Egyptian political life under Sadat, and subsequently Mubarak, requires a re-evaluation of the decay of liberalism prior to revolution, and of the Nasserist values the officers came to propound in the course of their years in power. Through his analysis of the period, he attempts to answer questions such as "What options did Egypt's political leaders promote as the old regime tottered?" and "Did the officers have a pre-conceived political agenda?"

But, though well researched, and certainly well-formulated, something is missing from the study. For starters, Gordon never clearly defines his terminology. Even his use of the term "revolution" is never conclusively explained. Throughout the book he steers a wavering middle course between a Marxist perspective and its sometime antithesis, the supposedly "realist" power politics expounded by celebrity statesmen such as Kissinger.

Gordon goes to great lengths to justify his choice of topic: he sees the political debate in Egypt today as coloured by the ongoing debate about the aims and successes of the Free Officers, as the nation strives to rediscover its past in formulating policies for the future. This is why the early years of the revolution are so important: according to Gordon, as manifestations of the revolution, and of the shape and content of Egyptian political life under Sadat, and subsequently Mubarak, requires a re-evaluation of the decay of liberalism prior to revolution, and of the Nasserist values the officers came to propound in the course of their years in power. Through his analysis of the period, he attempts to answer questions such as "What options did Egypt's political leaders promote as the old regime tottered?" and "Did the officers have a pre-conceived political agenda?"

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Carved in tablets of stone? Not quite, as this 9th century manuscript shows. And if it is not quite the language spoken by 12th century Sicilian Arabs, *Understanding Arabic* will tell you why

or *fi sha*. In other words, speakers are acutely aware of the diglossic nature of their language situation, and of the two varieties that make up this situation. However, when they actually produce language, be it spoken or written, the overwhelming tendency is to produce language that falls somewhere between the two.

Nabil M. A. Abdel-Fattah argues that newspaper language need not be viewed with suspicion, as a source of destruction of Classical Arabic. It should be viewed instead as a valuable source of linguistic data on the current changes taking place in Modern Standard Arabic. Systematic analysis of newspaper language would be beneficial not only to descriptive studies of Arabic but also to teachers of Arabic as a foreign language, when their students wish to study the Arabic of today rather than the language of past generations.

In the context of Egyptian journalism, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used to relay current events and commentaries to readers in a linguistic medium that is essentially neutral, simple, yet expressive and communicative. It is these characteristics that set journalistic writing apart from other forms of writing. Even though journalistic language shares some of the characteristics of scientific and literary writing, it is not as specific and dry as the former, nor as aesthetic and metaphorical as the latter, and is essentially employed for pragmatic and social rather than for literary or scientific purposes (Hamza 1961). Scientific and literary language, on the other hand, share some, but not all of the

functions and features of journalistic language. The former shares with journalistic language its concern for factuality, while the latter shares its concern for style.

Most new writing today follows what is commonly known in journalistic jargon as the "inverted pyramid" method, which dictates that any story be presented in paragraphs with the most important elements in the top paragraph followed by the remaining paragraphs in an order of descending importance. This form of writing, as Anderson and Little state, "puts the climax of a story at the beginning, in the head." The adoption of this method in Egyptian journalism in the 1950s in the hands of the founders of *Akhar El-Yom* newspaper, Ali and Mustafa Amin, reflected a marked change in the philosophy of journalistic writing. Prior to the appearance of *Akhar El-Yom*, reporters sought to keep their readers in suspense for the longest time possible by holding the crucial details until the end of the report.

However, the book is a qualitative description of language variation, but it must be followed by interpretive that may be applied in explaining language behaviour in the Egyptian community. We hope more studies will be made to elaborate a taxonomy of language situations, and that ultimately, that taxonomy will be replaced by a consistent frame of reference in which this kind of thinking about language and this kind of research might be done.

Reviewed by M. Shebl El-Komy

Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution, Joel Gordon, AUC Press, Cairo, 1996

Tripping on the middle ground

This is not bedtime reading. Focusing on what he describes as "the transitional period from coup d'état to revolution" Joel Gordon has taken upon himself the task of reintroducing the first years of the Egyptian revolution of 1952. And as with any historical analysis which rests on very distinct theoretical parameters, his argument works only if you accept all the facets of the theory he meticulously constructs — should the reader be so bold as to attempt with a single aspect of his argument the whole edifice becomes shaky and unconvincing.

Under Nasser, the military regime launched an ambitious programme of political, social and economic reform. Egypt became a leader in Arab and non-aligned politics, as well as a model for political mobilisation and national development throughout the Third World. According to the author, this historical legacy often diverts attention away from the early years of the revolution itself, a period of transition in which Nasser and his colleagues grappled for direction. Gordon tries to differentiate his work from the plethora of studies on the revolution, by offering his own version of "how the regime solidified its hold over the state and the effect that process, the political revolution, had on a nascent social revolution". His complex account of the characters and events of the period are supported by interviews with participants and observers of the incidents described.

Gordon goes to great lengths to justify his choice of topic: he sees the political debate in Egypt today as coloured by the ongoing debate about the aims and successes of the Free Officers, as the nation strives to rediscover its past in formulating policies for the future. This is why the early years of the revolution are so important: according to Gordon, as manifestations of the revolution, and of the shape and content of Egyptian political life under Sadat, and subsequently Mubarak, requires a re-evaluation of the decay of liberalism prior to revolution, and of the Nasserist values the officers came to propound in the course of their years in power. Through his analysis of the period, he attempts to answer questions such as "What options did Egypt's political leaders promote as the old regime tottered?" and "Did the officers have a pre-conceived political agenda?"

But, though well researched, and certainly well-formulated, something is missing from the study. For starters, Gordon never clearly defines his terminology. Even his use of the term "revolution" is never conclusively explained. Throughout the book he steers a wavering middle course between a Marxist perspective and its sometime antithesis, the supposedly "realist" power politics expounded by celebrity statesmen such as Kissinger.

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The former views revolutions as the "locomotive of history", the inevitable transition which propels the world from one historical era and economic system to another. Individuals may act in a revolution, but they do not create the conditions for social upheaval — they are instead the beneficiaries of a wave of change which they ride to achieve their ends. The alternative perspective views revolutions not as the inevitable evolution of historical and economic factors, but as the work of power seeking individuals, who subvert the system and create chaos to satisfy their own Machiavellian ends.

What remains so disconcerting to the reader is that Gordon's book attempts to incorporate both traditions in what turns out to be a rather uneasy union.

For him the Free Officers both did and did not bring about the July Revolution of 1952. Though the Free Officers are at the centre of his study, he rejects theories that depict their role as inevitable. "It is too often taken for granted that Egypt stood on the brink of social revolution, and that if the Free Officers takeover was not inevitable, their assumption of absolute power was." He condemns this as the product of hindsight and the rewriting of history by the officers once in power. For him the revolution was a much more haphazard affair, "a military coup organised by junior officers with unfocused

goals and limited ambitions which became over the course of the following decade a revolution from above that transformed Egyptian society and reoriented the way Egyptians look at themselves and the world."

At the same time, he argues that the officers should not be at the centre of the debate. The failure of the old regime was also "the result of external factors... The officers were acted upon as much as they acted." And among the external factors he cites — is the well-documented background role of the foreign powers.

In spite of incongruities this book should (and does) form a staple ingredient of any academic booklist, as a supplement to students interested in the politics and the history of the region. Characterising the transition period as "one of experimentation, groping, and shifting alliances", the book focuses in detail on the complex manoeuvring between military and civilians during the first two years of military rule. But that is exactly the problem. To the lay reader with only a shaky understanding of events, this book becomes confusing. The wealth of detail, though informative, often obscures the bigger picture. Gordon's book preaches to the converted — it is no introduction to first time readers.

Reviewed by Yasmin Allam

Plain Talk

During my recent visit to London I asked the British Council to arrange meetings with organisations involved in children's literature, a domain of writing that has always interested me. So they did, and I had the pleasure of being introduced to a number of people, either writing for children, or advising on the right books to read.

The Young Book Trust was such an organisation. It was quite an experience walking through their offices and browsing through the thousand and one books displayed on their shelves. The Trust's main task is, in their own words, "to bring children and books together". The Book Trust has already celebrated its 70th anniversary, but it was not until 1970 that the "Young" section was born in order to provide information concerning children's books. With 7,000 new titles published every year, one can realise the magnitude of the Trust's responsibilities.

The work starts with reading the newspapers and scanning them for references to books and publishing houses. All articles and interviews are cut out to be filed and book reviews are checked against the Trust's own records. While I was there, the telephone didn't stop ringing, with all types of questions for the Trust to answer. The majority of calls, however, come from researchers, television, radio, and other media, and are mainly concerned with checking facts and arranging contacts with authors.

A large number of inquiries come from bookshops trying to sort out different customers' orders and exploring some of the titles they were not aware of. The ordinary public, though, is not without its own requests, either trying to discuss books, confirming general information or complaining about the services of certain bookshops.

The Trust publishes a magazine called *Our Choice*. It is best described as a report of what children like to read. Twenty schools from all over the United Kingdom receive a big box full of books from the Trust, aimed at the 11 to 16 year-old reader. The pupils were asked to select books which appealed to them, read them and then send their reviews to the Trust. The result of this little experiment is the third edition of *Our Choice*, containing reviews of books varying from realistic stories to poetry and drama, with horror, comedy and thrillers in between.

The Trust also publishes a magazine called *YBT News*, which features articles by authors of children's literature, comments on the publication of children's books and a profile of one of the writers. In one of the issues I found a charming statement by Jane Churchill, a leading author, which captures the spirit of an ideal writer for children: "I love creating books for children," she writes. "The UK has an unparalleled wealth of children's book talents, past, present and future. No one has the faintest idea if our next book will be successful; children will be the final decision makers. It's a funny old business, and I wouldn't want it any other way."

In spite of the spread of television, magazines in England still manage to spread their branches and continuously increase. Not only are they regarded as fun — which is not a negligible aspect — but offer tremendous educational benefit.

The report also shows that magazines are read and reread by children to the extent that they are often almost known by heart. When they finish "devouring" them, they are not thrown away, but are placed on the ever growing pile and become part of a prized collection.

Meeting, watching and listening in what is being done for British children, I could not but feel deeply sorry for our children. When I was asked at the Young Book Trust about the number of new titles published annually in Egypt, I had no reply. I was happy that I was not asked about the number of children's magazines.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Festival of Arabic Music, 1-10 Nov: Programme

Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926.

1 Nov, 8pm. Traditional Oriental songs: lyrics by Mustafa Mahmoud (Egypt), music by Tewfik Al-Basha (Lebanon), conducted by Mustafa Naghi (Egypt); with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Opera Choir. Musical interlude: Mohamed El-Helw, with the Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt).

2 Nov, 8pm. Tashina Oriental Music Troupe (Gallilee), conducted by Nassim Dakour. The Aisawa Troupe (Morocco). The National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Selim Sahab (Egypt). Musical interlude: Rozan Kamel (Egypt) and Elias Karam (Syria).

3 Nov, 8pm. The Arabic Music Professors' Syndicate Troupe (Syria), conducted by Mohieddin Al-Hamashi. Musical interlude: Khaled Ben Hussein and Ghada perform music by Youssef Al-Mehana (Kuwait). The Attaya Sharara Sextet (Egypt). Musical interlude: Ghada Ragab (Egypt) and Sabar Al-Roba'i (Tunisia).

4 Nov, 8pm. The Conservatoire Orchestra: concerto for violin and orchestra, composed by Attaya Sharara, soloist Hassan Sharara (Egypt). Musical interlude: Manal Madani (Gallilee). Traditional Music (Iraq). Mohamed Amin Troupe (Saudi Arabia). Musical interlude: Ali Abdel-Kerim (Saudi Arabia) and Hayat Al-Jidris (Morocco).

5 Nov, 8pm. Songs by Sabah Fakhry (Syria). Sabri Mediala Troupe (Syria). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt). Musical interlude: Elias Karam (Syria) and Naghab Sallam (Lebanon) with the Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt).

6 Nov, 8pm. Songs by Sabah Fakhry (Syria). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt). Musical interlude: Laila Ali (Morocco) and Noureddin Al-Bajl (Tunisia). Traditional Oriental songs: compositions by Attaya Sharara, vocals by Nelly Zeidan and Mohamed Abdel-Satter (Egypt). Musical interlude: Medhat Saleh (Egypt).

7 Nov, 8pm. Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Troupe, conducted by Qadri Sorour (Egypt). Abu Sherif (Morocco). Nour El-Husseini Ensemble for Arabic Music (Jordan). Musical interlude: Sofia Sadeq (Tunisia). 18 Nov, 8pm. National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt). Musical interlude: Hani Shaker (Egypt).

8 Nov, 8pm. Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 341 2926. 2 Nov, 8pm. Al-Woudayia Troupe for Andalusian Music (Algeria). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi (Egypt). Musical interlude: Noureddin Al-Bajl (Tunisia). Hayat Al-Jidris (Morocco). Sabri Mediala Troupe (Syria). Musical interlude: Ali Abdel-Kerim (Saudi Arabia).

3 Nov, 9pm. Tashina Oriental Music Ensemble (Gallilee). Al-Aisawa Troupe (Morocco). Musical interlude: May (Egypt), Abdel-Hadi Belkhiyat (Morocco). National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Selim Sahab (Egypt). 6 Nov, 9pm. Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Troupe, conducted by Qadri Sorour (Egypt). Mohamed Amin Troupe (Saudi Arabia). Abu Al-Sherif (Morocco). The Zeitoun Institute for the Blind (Egypt). Musical interlude: Manal Madani (Gallilee).

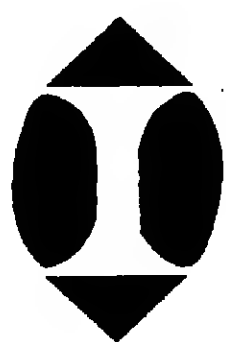
8 Nov, 9pm. National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Selim Sahab (Egypt). The Arabic Music Professors' Syndicate Troupe (Syria), conducted by Mohieddin Al-Hamashi. Musical interlude: Sabar Al-Roba'i (Tunisia). National Arabic Music Ensemble and the Opera Children's Choir, conducted by Selim Sahab (Egypt). 9 Nov, 9pm. The American University Arabic Music Troupe, conducted by Mustafa Ahmed. Traditional Music (Iraq). Musical interlude: Ahmed Ibrahim (Egypt).

Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926.

3 Nov, 5.30pm. Out vocal by Mounir Beshir. 4 Nov, 5.30pm. Children's Choir Troupe, The Suzuki Ensemble for violin (Egypt). 5 Nov, 5.30pm. The Wedadiya Troupe for Andalusian Music (Algeria).

6 Nov, 5.30pm. Panel discussion on the works of Mahmoud Ahmed El-Hefni, to mark his centenary. Panel chair Samia El-Kholi (Egypt). 9 Nov, 5.30pm. Lecture by Gomaa Ben Khamis Al-Shidi: The Role of The Oman Traditional Music Centre in the Conservation of Musical Heritage. The lecturer is the director of the centre.

Lecture by Essam Al-Mallah: Omani Music as a Discipline. The lecturer is the centre's advisor and professor of Ethnic Music, Munich University (Oman).



Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts celebrates 5 decades of excellence



Fifty years of innovation and expertise

1996 marks the 50th anniversary for Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts worldwide. In two spectacular gala evenings, Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts Middle East and Africa and the Semiramis Inter-Continental celebrated "Five Decades of Excellence" at the hotel.

Over 800 guests from 17 countries in the Middle East and Africa were welcomed by Mr and Mrs Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Resorts Middle East and North Africa, and Mr and Mrs Hans Werner Olbertz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental.

Raymond Khalife started the evening off with a note of thanks to all guests for their continued support and patronage, followed by an exciting presentation given by an Inter-Continental area executive which took the audience

through landmark events that happened to Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts between 1946 and 1996.

Highlights of these spectacular events were world-renown Alex and Craig, Linda Flemming, Talaat Zein and famous Oriental belly-dancer Dina.

As an end-note the staff of the Semiramis Inter-Continental joined the guests in a celebration with a 50th anniversary parade, a birthday cake and a big Thank You bouquet of balloons.

Inter-Continental today has 190 hotels in 67 countries with plans to have more than 200 Inter-Continental and Forum International Hotels and 100 global partner hotels by the year 2000, and will no doubt continue on its surge to serve the 21st century guests. With 50 years of innovation and expertise, Inter-Continental will be there to provide, well into the millennium.



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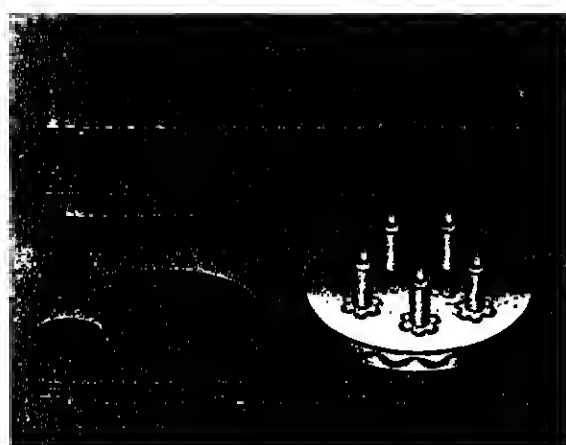
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Mr Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts, Middle East and North Africa, and Mr Hans Werner Olbertz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental, cutting the 50th anniversary cake



Mr Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts, Middle East and North Africa, and Mr Hans Werner Olbertz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental, cutting the 50th anniversary cake

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هكذا من الأصل

The earth trembled for only one minute, and thousands of lives were changed forever. But how? Four years later, Mariz Tadros explores the answer



The '93 tremor brought down apartment buildings like so many card houses, destroyed ancient places of worship and new places of learning. Tent camps became home for thousands of victims

Earthquake: four years after

For Umm Amr, being a single parent with three children was hard enough — the last thing she needed was an earthquake to jolt her family's already precarious existence. "My husband left me eight years ago to marry a younger woman. I haven't seen him since, although I hear he is doing well. He hasn't spent a penny on his children since he left," she said.

When the earth shook for a minute in Cairo at 3:14pm, on 12 October 1992, Umm Amr's husband was living in a solid home in Imbaba. But the mother of three lost her home and eventually had to struggle to find somewhere to live. Even though Umm Amr was repeatedly told that her place in Boulak El-Dokroui was unfit to live in because the earthquake had weakened the walls, she and her children continued to live there for over a year until they were relocated to a new one-bedroom unit in El-Nahda, 15km northeast of Cairo.

Umm Amr and her children are one of thousands of families in Greater Cairo displaced by the earthquake and resettled by the government in seven settlement areas including Qasaba, Dowaga, El-Nahda, El-Ayat, Maadhyat El-Bakari, Maqattam and Ain Helwan.

"We were very lucky that when the earthquake happened, leaving thousands on the streets, we had vacant low-cost housing blocks. These were initially built for new university graduates and new-hyeds," explained Youssef Hassan, under-secretary of the housing and utilities department for Cairo Governorate. There are three main settlement complexes in Cairo — El-Nahda, Maqattam, and Ain Helwan — he added.

Four years after the earthquake, Hassan admits that not all displaced families in Cairo have been resettled yet. "For a while the construction of new buildings stopped because the contractors had claims on the government which were long overdue. But the government has resolved this problem and over the last six months, more homes have been built. The last 2,000 displaced families will be resettled in El-Nahda and Maqattam by December at the latest."

However, even for those who received their units shortly after the earthquake, there is still some ambiguity about how much of the cost they will have to bear. For Umm Amr and many like her, the issue of rent is very distressing. Working full-time as a house cleaner, the change of location meant that she could no longer work for the same households in the heart of Cairo and nobody in her new neighbourhood could afford a cleaner.

The Red Crescent unit in El-Nahda offered her a job two years ago. She earns LE90 monthly — of which she has to pay LE30 for rent. The rest of her salary must be stretched as far as possible to cover her children's school tuition and food expenses.

"I heard rumours I will have to start paying back rent for the first few months which I thought were free. I can't afford it, unless we all go without food. Will they throw me out if I can't pay?" Umm Amr demanded.

Hassan denied the possibility: "Nobody will be forced to leave their homes. We have not thrown anybody out and this is an unlikely scenario. Can you imagine the public reaction if we threw some-

one out because they were too poor to pay?" He also denied accusations that some residents are now being asked to pay instalments as high as LE1,000 for the first months in which they paid no rent.

"The People's Assembly decided that instalments should be paid over a period of 40 instead of 30 years, with the same interest rate of 6 per cent and they increased the housing loan to LE14,000 per unit," he added. "In the end, don't forget they have brand new homes they would never have dreamt of before. The day the units were being handed out to El-Nahda, you could hear women ululating, many of whom had been living in slum conditions before."

Slum or no slum, alternative housing is still, if anything, a mixed blessing for the majority. On the bright side, millions of pounds were poured into making their new habitat as comprehensive in services as is realistically possible. El-Nahda and Ain Helwan, for instance, were chosen as pilot community development projects by the government and UNICEF. In El-Nahda, the Egyptian Red Crescent Society was involved in resettling over 42,000 people and at Ain Helwan, the Integrated Care Society, a non-governmental organisation chaired by Suzanne Mubarak, helped resettle 30,000 people.

Hoda Barakat, general manager of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, explained that a few weeks after the earthquake, the society was suddenly confronted with the task of settling low-income families from more than 13 different poor and unplanned districts across Cairo to the remote area of El-Nahda.

"In the beginning, there was no infrastructure, not

all the units were ready, there were no roads, no services or facilities and no transport to and from El-Nahda," recalls Barakat.

Within a short period of time, the Red Crescent helped open three markets, a post office and helped distribute over 150 commercial shops to local inhabitants. According to a survey the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) conducted at El-Nahda, 52 per cent of families have a monthly income less than LE200. The majority of new settlers had no regular jobs, skills or trade.

The psychological and social turmoil of being suddenly uprooted from one's community of family and friends was as draining as the lack of a solid income. Aida Guindy, member of the executive board of the Integrated Care Society and former UNICEF director for Europe and Africa, was a key player in mobilising community development and cooperation at Ain Helwan. Inaugurated by Suzanne Mubarak in early 1993, Ain Helwan received an award as one of the top 10 urban development projects at the United Nations Habitat II conference held in Turkey last year.

Without a network of friends and neighbours, a new residence would never become home. "For many families, it took over two years to settle down. Some chose to go and live with relatives instead. Some received their apartments but wouldn't live in them. The losses were tremendous — even if it was just an old mattress or a rickety chair or a family bed," said Guindy.

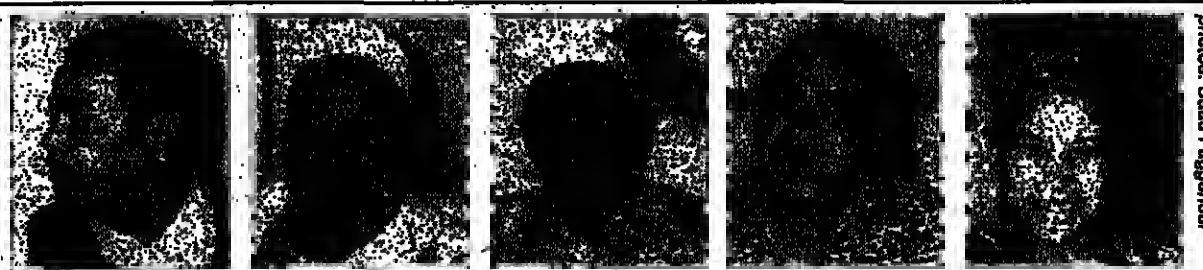
Many felt isolated, bitter and dispirited. "But we still wanted to promote the concept of participation — it is their community; they must be involved in

the planning and execution of any programme; they must participate in the decision-making process," she asserted.

Practically, that meant the election of a cluster leader for every building to communicate, discuss and express the interests of his block. Out of 14 cluster leaders in Ain Helwan, 12 are women. Cluster leaders gather every fortnight for a neighbourhood committee meeting and are elected by the residents annually.

The idea, explained Guindy, was "to empower the community to identify and put forward their own suggestions about how to deal with their most pressing problems." Social clubs for women, the elderly, the disabled and children were set up to foster a feeling of togetherness. Community initiatives ranging from literacy classes, to the ABCs of electricity and plumbing, environmental protection, legal advice, health and prenatal care all targeted women, especially female-headed households like those of Umm Amr.

Female-headed households constitute 25 per cent of all families in El-Nahda and 20 per cent in Ain Helwan. Many families were torn apart by the earthquake — some men, having lost their residence, remarried a woman from the neighbourhood so that they wouldn't have to move out. "But now we worry about unemployment amongst the youth which is as high as 40 per cent in Ain Helwan," said Guindy. "The men come to us and tell us that we are concentrating on women and children and not paying sufficient attention to their economic needs. We still have to look into the economic development of our community more carefully."



Starting from scratch

"We are trying to live, but I can't say we are really living — at least not like before," said Ali Abdel-Magid, speaking from his modest new apartment in El-Nahda, 15 kilometres northeast of Cairo. Before the 1992 earthquake, Abdel-Magid, his wife Yonna, and their six children lived in an old 5-bedroom flat in the lower-middle class Cairo district of El-Sayed Zein. When the earthquake hit, Abdel-Magid was at work and Yonna was cooking lunch. "I grabbed the children and just ran. I could feel the stairs crumbling under my feet," Yonna recalled. Within minutes, the whole building had tumbled to the ground.

"My life savings were lost in a moment under the rubble," lamented Abdel-Magid. Pointing to his virtually toothless mouth, he added, "I got diabetes immediately afterwards and my teeth fell out."

Abdel-Magid, 60, painted houses for 14 years in Kuwait. "My dream was to give my children the best life possible. I wanted them to have a comfortable home. You should have visited my place before the earthquake. Oh, it was exquisite — the nicest furniture and lots of household appliances. I didn't want my family to want for anything, so I worked day and night to save every piastre," he said.

During those 14 years, Abdel-Magid did save a total of LE80,000. But it was all buried in the earthquake. The painter had also kept his

savings at home with his mother rather than in a bank because he wanted to make sure that when he travelled, his mother and sister would have immediate access to any amount of cash.

"My mother was old and sick and my sister had a heart condition — I had to make sure they would be taken care of. But I didn't know this would happen," he sighed. After the earthquake, Abdel-Magid returned with rescue workers to look for his money. But they found nothing but rubble.

The family finally moved to their new residence in El-Nahda after spending 40 days in a tent at a makeshift camp site in Sayeda Zeinab. "We had to start from scratch," explained Abdel-Magid. "I still haven't finished paying off the instalments for all the furniture you see here."

To pay off the remaining instalments, Abdel-Magid sells sandwiches. On average, his monthly earnings are around LE150 — LE70 of which is for rent. The rent for his old five-bedroom apartment in Sayeda Zeinab was only LE56.

"I just can't face going back to Kuwait to go up and down scaffolds anymore, I'm too old for that," he explained. With the help of the Red Crescent, Abdel-Magid has acquired a small shop where he plans to sell painting supplies. "I know I'll never be remotely compensated for my losses, even if I make a profit from the shop. On the other hand, my losses amount to nothing when I think that

my family came out unharmed," he said.

For 74-year-old Fadl Mohamed Ibrahim, and his wife Siti Zoubah, the spacious, sunny, one-bedroom flat they have been given is a real dream home. Before the earthquake, they were living in a slum area of Dar El-Bassari, behind El-Imam El-Shafic Street in Al-Azhar district.

Ibrahim sold fried liver and occasionally watermelons, too. He and his wife managed to save their few belongings (a cupboard, table, bed and stove) before the entire building collapsed. "Of course, this is a much nicer place than the one we were living in. I like our new home," he said with satisfaction as his wife nodded in agreement.

Since he settled in El-Nahda nearly four years ago, Ibrahim has not been asked to pay any rent, just electricity. "You know I spent my life savings (LE370) on some wood to patch together a kiosk for my wife and myself after the earthquake. For three months, we lived in the kiosk until we came here," he recalled.

Despite their feelings of comfort, Ibrahim and Siti Zoubah long for the atmosphere of their old *kay* (communal district), where everyone knew each other well and where they lived a doorstep away from their three married daughters. Now, they are all alone, isolated and feeling somewhat alien in this far away new settlement. The couple are mostly dependent on

the goodwill of their new neighbours for their welfare, but Siti Zoubah adds, "My daughters help, too. They each take turns to come all the way from El-Imam once a week to bring us food and goodies. I regret not seeing them as much as before, but what can they do? It takes them nearly two hours to come here."

Commuting between the old and the new is a real hassle for many, including Adel Mohamed and Hossneya El-Saad. Mohamed earned his living near Al-Azhar street as a car park attendant. Since he has no real trade, he sees little opportunity in El-Nahda — after all, there are virtually no cars and no shortage of parking.

Now the burden of his household is greater than before. "Often I have to pay LE1.50 to get to work because I'm forced to take a microbus since the bus is so cramped," Mohamed makes LE6-7 a day, LE3 of which is for transport. Consequently, the leftover money to feed the family of seven is not enough.

And, according to Hossneya, the problems don't end there. "I can't buy my household needs from here, everything is too expensive and the bread doesn't taste nice. Besides, I'm used to doing my shopping in El-Ataba."

Mohamed's children will undoubtedly grow up in a nicer flat, in a clean, new district, but their parents will continue to find difficulty in adjusting to this new life — and all the additional costs it entails.

Trying times

IF KHALED Hassan is renowned in sports circles for being the first disabled swimmer to cross the English Channel, he is better known amongst residents of El-Nahda for having been there with them right from the beginning. It all started when Hassan was summoned by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports to work at their branch in El-Salam City, a new Cairo satellite development, 15km northeast of the capital.

Coincidentally that was the year of the 1992 earthquake and a camp site was set up in the city for displaced families. Tents were provided for 150 families while another 150 were accommodated in the gymnasium courts. For 40 days, Hassan did not go back home to visit his family once. He worked from dawn till late at night. To help register around 1,500 persons from districts including Old Cairo, Shubra, El-Gamaleya and El-Sharabeya, an action group of 15 youths, including Hassan, was mobilised.

"We were especially worried about security at that point. Although the army and police were there, we were scared that unchecked food supplies would spread around the camps. The Egyptian Red Crescent arrived soon after the tents were drawn... food, medicine and blankets were distributed," Hassan recalled.

A typical day for Hassan began at 9am when he and his team would serve breakfast brought by the army. Dinner was served in the same manner. In between, Hassan and the other volunteers organised recreational activities for the children; school didn't start again until two weeks after the 12 October earthquake.

"Relief assistance was arriving in large quantities. We distributed it in the evening, family by family, because many felt very awkward about receiving charity," explained Hassan. "One time when I was distributing food, I found no response from one tent. I whacked my stick against the tent pole and suddenly I heard screams and cries. The entire family came rushing out — they thought it was an earthquake warning. This feeling of insecurity and alarm lingered on

for almost 6 months after families were resettled in El-Nahda. Hassan also moved with the families to El-Nahda, this time under the umbrella of the Red Crescent.

"Whenever a gas cylinder seller used to pass by banging on a cylinder to call buyers, many would rush to their windows in distress, wondering whether it was an earthquake warning," he said. It was the first year that was particularly difficult for everyone, recounted Hassan. There were no street lights, no roads, no transport and worse, everybody felt alien to the place.

"When the local government was distributing the units, they did not have time to place people from the same area together — bear in mind that the customs, habits and way of living for a family from Shubra El-Kheima are very different from those of El-Sayed Zeinab. They all ended up being clumped together and rivalries started between families from different districts to see which one can impose its order on the others," said Hassan.

"You just didn't know who your neighbour was — if you had girls, then you automatically became suspicious of your neighbour's sons. So many families ended up locking themselves in their own unit without wanting to have anything to do with the rest," he explained.

Hassan believes that the elderly suffered the most. Sons and daughters who had families of their own units refused to move all the way to El-Nahda just to keep their parents company. At the same time many did not have enough space to accommodate their parents in their own homes.

"One winter night last year this 70-year-old woman sleeping on a piece of cardboard. Her children had abandoned her and she had lost all her belongings in the earthquake," Hassan recounted. "In other cases, neighbours would discover that an elderly man or woman has been dead for four or five days without anybody knowing."



Hassan: a four-year commitment

Guides resist new technology

Electronic guiding is here to stay, but guides are apprehensive about its consequences. Rehab Saad reports on a hot controversy

The use of headphones in museums and at archaeological sites around the world is becoming increasingly common. In Egypt, however, even initial efforts to introduce them at the Cairo Museum are being met with resistance from tour guides who fear losing their jobs.

In a meeting last month of the general assembly of the Guides' Syndicate, "electronic guiding" was discussed for the first time. The advantages of the innovation include its ability to preclude the need for guides to shout at large groups of tourists.

Thus, speaking into a microphone with each member of the group listening through a headphone, would reduce the level of noise in the museum.

The guides attending the meeting were unanimous in their dissent. They admitted that the use of tapes and headphones might be a facility to tourists, but they felt that the guides would lose considerably.

The assembly insisted that whether or not the guides assented, headphones were here to stay. Members pointed out that the use of this new technology, apart from reducing noise pollution in the museum and being a service to tourists, would have the added advantage of generating more income.

Nasry Iskandar of Cairo Museum pointed out that the use of tapes would not render a

guide useless. "Tapes outlining the history and giving details about an object would only be an added option available to tourists," he said.

Tourists themselves are generally in favour of using tapes. They say that the language standard on the tapes is higher than many guides', and therefore easier to understand. Also, many say that they do not have enough time to listen to a lot of details and would prefer to have a tape where they could control

However, since this is specifically designed for individuals, it is obviously unsuitable for Egypt's large group tours.

"Another type of headphone is like those worn by pilots," Qandil went on. "But these are cumbersome for tourists. A third mechanism, however, I felt is reasonable for use in Egypt. It is a small, lightweight apparatus used in many countries around the world. The tourists hold it and the guide speaks into a microphone. The main reason I am in favour of this is that it preserves the quality of the voice of the guide, makes his words audible to large groups and, at the same time, helps us keep abreast of modern technology."

"I am utterly against the use of this technology," said Ehab Farag, a conventional tour guide. "It would be a further waste of time for tourists who are already inconvenienced by the time taken to purchase tickets, place cameras and valuables in storage, etc. Another queue to hire a headphone will increase delays. At peak times, particularly in the mornings, there are literally thousands of tourists, and it would be unrealistic to expect them to wait to collect a headphone," he explained. Farag estimated that if he had a group of 40 people and each took 30 seconds to hire the equipment, they would waste 20 extra minutes. "Every group would be delayed, and in my opinion, the time factor is very important in keeping tourists satisfied," he argued.

Ziad Anwar, another tour guide, felt that although the adoption of such technology abroad might be well organised, "here in Egypt it would be totally impracticable with such large numbers of tour groups and individual tourists."

One important fact that most guides agree on is that the use of headphones would result in a loss of personal contact, especially the important eye contact between the guide and the group.

Resistance to change is only to be expected. The tour guides are afraid of losing their jobs, but, as Qandil explains, "we cannot avoid change. When the computer was introduced people feared that it would lead to mass unemployment; when the satellite became available, people thought it would replace Egyptian TV; but both have come to stay, and we must also project our tourism image into the future."

Additional problems with the use of head-

the amount and kind of information they receive.

The guides, however, are not convinced. Their reasoning is: How can the Syndicate and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) guarantee that if they introduced headphones and microphones it would not lead to the replacement of guides?

And so, a controversy rages over the pros and cons of the new technology. The matter remains unsettled. Those in favour of the new technology include some members of the board of the Guides' Syndicate. Lyla Qandil, its head, pointed out that several types of headphones had been suggested by investors, and that she had found some totally unsuitable for use in Egypt.

One particular type, however, she found appropriate. "The headphone I rejected is very popular at the Louvre," she said. "It is a small capsule, worn in the ear, containing all the necessary information about the monument being viewed. At the click of a button, the information is played.



Personal communication between guide and visitors in Luxor



A microphonic presentation to 50 tourists in Cairo Museum

photo: Sherif Sombol

phones were cited. Given the sensitivity of the equipment, it is bound to pick up not only the voice of the guide, but also all extraneous sounds from shuffling feet to coughing. Furthermore, many hygienically-minded tourists would be afraid of using them for fear of contracting diseases.

Yet despite the dissenting views of most of the tour guides, the Syndicate is moving toward the use of headphones, but no final decision has been made thus far.

One person in favour of this new technology is Sa'ad Salama, who is both a tour guide and a member of the board of the Syndicate. She said, "Technological advances always face opposition, but tourists are already using headphones in this country. I feel that if the Syndicate owned these, we would be able to control the situation. If, on the other hand, it is left to the travel agencies, the whole situation may become beyond our control."

A bigger piece of the sky

Egypt and the Middle East still have a long way to go before they get their fair share of the international tourist market. Sherine Nasr investigates

Air traffic problems in Egypt and the lack of coordination between tourist countries in the Middle East were two focal points in a symposium on "Tourism between Europe and Africa through the Middle East." It was held during the International Arab Travel Market (IATM) conference in Cairo last week.

A heated discussion took place between local government representatives and Egyptian and foreign tourism experts on how Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries can obtain a larger share of the international tourist market. It focused on issues of open-sky policy, air monopoly, encouraging travellers in transit to visit Cairo and tourism promotion.

Nehad Gad, under-secretary for international tourism at the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), said that Egypt has now implemented the open-sky policy formulated last February by cabinet decree. The decision has definitely increased the volume of air traffic through Egypt. By virtue of this decree, EgyptAir is now working at full capacity. "This decision could not have been taken earlier because in 1992 the number of tourists dropped dramatically and it was expedient to protect the national air carrier from competition," she said. She explained that support of EgyptAir, the national air carrier, is part of the state's tourism promotion policy.

Gad's disclosure of the open-sky policy and relaxation of aviation regulations was strongly criticised by Benjamin Corbin, chairman of the Metropolitan Tourism Association. He argued that the government is still a long way from removing the protection EgyptAir is receiving. "I would have thought that the importance of tourism to Egypt far exceeds the mistaken belief that the national airline should be protected," he said.

Corbin criticised EgyptAir's monopoly of air traffic in Egypt as well as its unwillingness to compete with major international airlines for the benefit of tourists. "When competition does not exist, travellers have to take what's available. It is a common problem in Egypt and the Middle East," he said.

Fahim Rayan, chairman of EgyptAir, contends that it is only fair that tourists on package tours should be carried by the national airline. "Otherwise, we would be losing almost 25 to 40 per cent

of the total tour profit, and that is a great deal," Rayan said.

Many cities worldwide are potential tourist markets for Egypt, but are not serviced by EgyptAir. "This is a great loss for Egypt. Our plan is to identify these places and supply them with service, in order to avoid losing them," said Gad.

According to tourism experts, airlines in Egypt and the Middle East should begin building alliances to obtain a larger portion of air traffic and also to provide more comprehensive services for tourists. "Such an alliance can work only if different airlines agree that they should complement not compete with each other," said a tourism official.

The suggestion was not welcomed by Rayan who claimed that alliances can only be made between airlines sharing the same standards, types of services and safety. "Alliances made with well-established airlines such as Lufthansa and British Airways are certain to destroy, not benefit EgyptAir. This is what is happening now in the air traffic market," he said. Rayan added that EgyptAir has, instead, market-sharing agreements with carriers such as Malaysian Airlines to carry passengers from the Far East to Europe through Egypt.

Corbin retorted that Rayan is using the same argument as all airlines, that they have to be protected from the big sharks in the industry. "It is a question of quality service. If you are running a good airline, you can easily compete," he said. The latest statistics show that the Middle East has achieved a 50 per cent growth rate in tourism development, the largest in the world. Egypt recorded the largest individual growth at almost 11.8 per cent. However, there has been no attempt by Egypt to encourage transit passengers to different destinations to pay a short visit to the country. "The potential volume is great and it could be beneficial for both parties," said Gad.

Rayan explained that most of Egypt's transit traffic was due to EgyptAir's worldwide network. "It is our job to promote traffic, not tourism. And it is impossible to convince a traveller to stop over in Cairo unless he is enticed to do so," he said.

Rayan suggested that tourists be given 'appetisers', or an incentive to stop over in Egypt as part of their journey. He

used South Africa as an example. An EgyptAir-associated travel office is promoting Egypt to tourists from South Africa. "We tell them that two days are all that's needed to visit the main attractions in Cairo—the Pyramids, the Islamic monuments and museums, etc.," he said. Rayan claims that he was the first to invite tourists from South Africa to stay in Egypt en route to other destinations even before diplomatic relations between the two countries were resumed. First, EgyptAir carried South African pilgrims to Saudi Arabia and on their return, they were encouraged to stop over in Cairo. "Later we managed to entice tourists to Egypt as their primary destination. Now we have four flights to South Africa a week," Rayan said.

He boasted that EgyptAir is increasing the number of non-stop flights to different parts of the world. "Frequent departures is not the most economical way to run an airline. Besides, businessmen, who make up a large sector of travellers, prefer non-stop flights," he said. EgyptAir now has five non-stop flights to New York per week.

Discussions, already heated, took another turn when it came to tourism promotion. Geoffrey Gray-Fortson, chairman of Meetings World Association, declared that none of Egypt's promotional offices in New York, London, Paris or Frankfurt could give any information on the IATM event. "Some tried to extract the information from EgyptAir but got no answer," Gray-Fortson said. Under-secretary Gad claimed that Egypt's offices abroad had issued press releases to inform tour operators about the event. "A local employee who did not know about it might have answered the phone but major officials certainly knew about the event," she assured.

Mohamed Nessim, owner of a major tourism company and former chairman of Meetings World Association, declared that none of Egypt's promotional offices in New York, London, Paris or Frankfurt could give any information on the IATM event. "Some tried to extract the information from EgyptAir but got no answer," Gray-Fortson said. Under-secretary Gad claimed that Egypt's offices abroad had issued press releases to inform tour operators about the event. "A local employee who did not know about it might have answered the phone but major officials certainly knew about the event," she assured.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Helwan), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria

Services depart every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 3pm; LE29 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Matruh. Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.

Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman. Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32.

Cairo-Port Said. Services every half hour from 6am to 9pm, 10pm, 3pm, and 4.30pm from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said

Services 6.45am from Ramsis Square to Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 3pm; LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada

Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza, Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalaa (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tugaid Square (near Helwan). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station on Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia

Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 10pm, from Qalaa, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.35, one way.

Cairo-Suez

Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalaa, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.35, one way.

Cairo-El-Ain

Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalaa, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE11; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Matruh

Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company. Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm and 11pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage

Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusai

Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor

Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Ain

Service 3pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan. Tel. 177 or 575-3353.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan

"French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.45pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE171; second class LE231. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE163; second class LE137.

Cairo-Alexandria

"Tahiri" trains. VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE12 without a meal. Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE21; second class LE17.

Cairo-Port Said

Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan

Tickets LE331 for Egyptians, LE143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor

Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE279 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE288 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE245 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office: 374036-324735

Alexandria Offices: Ram: 483357-482078

Giza: 5865461-5865434

Airport Office: 4218464-4227808-420237-4201989

Aswan Office: 315000/12234

Airport Office: 408307-408508

Assiut Office: 323151-322711-324000-328407

Mansoura Office: 363978-363733

Hurgada Office: 443591/4

Airport Office: 422833-443597

Ismailia Office: 328937-321958-221951/2-328936

Luxor Office: 388580/12234

Airport Office: 388567/8

Luxor Office Karnak: 382340

Marsa Matruh Office: 934398

Menoufia Office (Sheikh El Kama): 233302-233523-233522

New Valley Office: 688/901695

Port Said Office: 224129-222878-220921

Port Said Office Karnak: 238833-239970

Sharm El Sheikh Office: 680314-680409

Airport Office: 680408

Taba Office: 685330/14-530011

Direct: 5783620

Tanta Office: 311750/311780

Zakazik Office: 349829-349830/1

Baited breath

Former national team member Haithem Farouk is one of a growing number of Egyptian footballers to turn professional abroad. The athlete awaits a call to return home to play on the national team once again, reports Ragi Halim

At the time of Haithem Farouk's decision to play for the Netherlands' Feyenoord team the consensus among Egyptian football aficionados was that while he had displayed talent during his tenure at Olympic of Alexandria, he was not professional material. The naysayers had right on their side, for although the athlete's name had briefly appeared on the national team's roster, his abilities were questioned after he failed to distinguish himself on the field. Still worse, following their acrimonious split over Farouk's decision to leave the club, Olympic coach Farouk Gafar went on record saying that Farouk was an amateur who had only participated in friendlies and was as yet untested in official matches.



Haithem Farouk giving away autographs

The news from the Netherlands, however, despite his home critics, is that Farouk is displaying all the right stuff and has become one of the key players to a Feyenoord victory in the Dutch league.

As word of Farouk's triumph began reaching his native soil the Egyptian national team's technical staff, including both Gafar and former football star Mahmoud El-Khatib, gave thought to adding the player to the national squad. But, as the adage goes, seeing is believing and so El-Khatib booked a flight to Holland to assess the athlete in a report for the Egyptian Football Federation. The Federation is expected to tender a response concerning the future of the athlete with the national team imminently.

Farouk recently spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* about his life as a professional football player and his ambitions for the future. "I never dreamt of turning pro in one of the leading countries in football, such as the Netherlands," explained Farouk. "I am intoxicated with the experience because the game is very popular in Holland and the matches are very tough. I hope to distinguish myself in the club and prove that Egypt can provide top players."

Farouk began his football career with Olympic Club at the age of 14. In a career highlight the athlete was chosen to represent Egypt on the national team for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. A year later his short-lived tenure with the Egyptian national team began and ended.

Farouk's first flirtation with the Feyenoord team came about in 1993 when he met former coach Jack Swart while on a visit to his uncle's home in the Netherlands. It was then that the athlete made the critical decision to attempt a professional career. After a spell training at the Ajax Club under the wing of former Egyptian national team coach Ruud Krol, but having little luck landing a permanent berth at one of the clubs, Farouk went home.

"I returned to Egypt, but then left again in September 1995," Farouk explained. "Around that time I was introduced to 'Nol du Raouwer' who was training the Amstert Club. But because of its low budget, the club couldn't afford a new defender," Farouk added.

The future began to look more promising when Yugoslavian born Mick Samardzic introduced Farouk to officials at Excelsior Club. Negotiations were well under way when Olympic Club raised objections. "Unfortunately Olympic Club refused to release me and attempted to stifle my chances by claiming that I was an amateur," Farouk explained. "It turned out to be a blessing because when I contacted FIFA, its officials told me that being an amateur afforded me the privilege of moving to any club I wished without the approval of my local club."

Despite the protracted negotiations and the advice of FIFA, the negotiations with Excelsior club fell through. Farouk's big break followed soon after when he signed with the Feyenoord Club. The footballer quickly found that while the name of the game is the same, the play in the two countries is completely different.

"In Egypt we depend mainly on defense, whereas here in the Netherlands the play is open," Farouk explained. "That is why the games are always thrilling."

Farouk estimates that his level of play has improved by nearly 30 per cent since his arrival in the Netherlands and he is anxiously awaiting the final outcome of El-Khatib's assessment. Until then, Farouk, along with Egyptian football fans, will have to await his summons for a place on the national team. "As hard as it is I will wait with patience until I am called to my real place," said Farouk.



Sfaxien of Tunisia were aggressive but Zamalek managed to take control of the field

photo: Mohamed Wassim

A renaissance of sports

Zamalek and Arab Contractors dual wins cheered soccer fans this weekend during qualifications for the finals of the African Champions' and Cup Winners cups. The Contractors are poised to seize the trophy for the first time in 14 years reports Inas Mazhar

Zamalek displayed oerms of steel on Sunday as they squeezed into their fourth African Champions Cup final in 12 years. The Egyptian team converted an early spot kick to defeat Sfaxien of Tunisia 1-0 in Alexandria and forced a penalty shoot-out where their greater accuracy proved decisive.

A first-leg encounter between Tunisia's Sfaxien and Zamalek, played in Tunis two weeks ago, ended with the same 1-0 result in the Tunisian's favour and ensured an all-out battle for the final berth. Zamalek substitute goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed, who succeeded in saving two kicks, helped secure the Egyptian team's 4-3 qualification to the final.

Zamalek's win in the gripping North African showdown was produced despite the absence of suspended defender Nabil Mahmoud and midfielder Ahmed El-Kass.

The Tunisians travelled to Egypt with a dismal away record and fell behind after just 19 minutes of play. Sfaxien rarely abandoned their defensive shell, even in the second half, and Zamalek goalkeeper Hussein El-Sayed was largely consigned to the role of spectator.

Zamalek, banned by the African Football Federation from playing at home in the Cairo Stadium following fan riots a few months ago, is scheduled to play a first-leg match against Shooting Stars of Nigeria next month in an away game. The second will be held in Egypt. Shooting Stars edged into the final with a 1-0 triumph over JS Kabylie of Algeria before a capacity 50,000 crowd in Ibadan. Arab Contractors in parallel action completed a memorable day for Egypt by reaching their 3rd Cup Winners Cup final by drawing 1-1 against the once-mighty Canon Yaounde of Cameroon. The draw pits the Contractors against Sodergraf of Zaïre and has revived the team's hopes of regaining the cup trophy for the first time in 14 years.

Watched by 40,000 spectators under the heavy rain in Cameroon, the Contractors established a one-goal lead after 61 minutes when Abdel-Satar Sabri struck a hard woo goal.

The Canon-Contractors home match was played in Cairo a fortnight ago and ended with a 2-1 victory for the Egyptian team. Canon, forcing 14 corners in the first half without unduly troubling goalkeeper Ahmed Saber, equalised two minutes before the final whistle when Jupiter Ngangai converted a penalty.

In an highly anticipated encounter Sodergraf and Arab Contractors are to meet for the first-leg match in Cairo next month.

'I'll be back'

The brilliant career of Nigeria's 20-year-old Olympic hero, Nwankwo Kanu is on hold following the discovery of a life-threatening heart condition. Abeer Anwar reports

Nwankwo Kanu, the 20-year-old star of Nigerian football has been diagnosed with a heart valve defect on the eve of his season debut with Italy's Internazionale Club. The condition was discovered during routine fitness tests conducted on all players prior to the start of the season and there is speculation that the condition may end what, by all appearances, promised to be a stellar career.

Kanu, it seems, has been playing with the ailment for quite some time and there is bewilderment why the condition wasn't found earlier. "It is amazing that no one discovered the problem before we did," commented Piero Volpi, Internazionale's team doctor.

In fact, statements from Kanu's former club Amsterdam's Ajax stand in direct contrast to those given by the team of doctors enlisted by Internazionale. Ajax treasurer, Arie Van On, went on record as saying that his club's medical check-ups had never discovered anything amiss with Kanu's health.

But Bruno Caru, one of the three heart specialists who have studied the Kanu case, expressed dismay that the condition was not detected earlier. "I am surprised that Kanu has been able to play for so many years in Holland and during the recent Olympics without any complaints. He

might have died at any second". Dr Caru explained that the nature of the heart malady precluded any course of treatment other than surgery. The Olympian will have to undergo an operation to replace his aortic valve in an attempt to alleviate his condition.

Kanu, who began his professional career with Ajax, left the club after a two-year stint, to play for Internazionale last July for a reported 600,000 sterling a-year contract. He had played in four friendly pre-season matches before he was given the tragic news of the heart ailment that may end his short but illustrious career.

Kanu, with the characteristic determination that has propelled him thus far, steadfastly refuses to accept the possibility of an end to his football playing days.

"It's hard to describe the nightmare I am going through, but I don't believe everything is finished. I will go to the best specialists in the world in order to play again. I just can't imagine giving up soccer," commented Kanu.

The football hero recently celebrated his 20th birthday in style, collecting a gold medal in the wake of Nigeria's historic defeat of Argentina in the Atlanta Olympics. Kanu's age belies the catalogue of achievements he has amassed since he was

a 1993 World Junior Cup winner. The talented footballer helped Ajax Amsterdam win two Dutch league titles and one World Club Cup after signing on in 1994. Kanu proved his mettle as a substitute on Ajax's 1995 Champions Cup winning team and scored two brilliant goals against Brazil in the recent Olympic semi-finals to steer Nigeria to a memorable 4-3 victory.

Subsequent to his diagnosis by an Italian heart specialist, Kanu flew to the London-based practice of Egyptian cardiologist Dr Magdi Yaqoub for a second opinion. Dr Yaqoub confirmed his condition but was able to give assurances of a promising future.

"Kanu will have to undergo surgery and barring any complications will be able to return to the playing field," explained Yaqoub. The opinion was seconded by another cardiologist residing in America who believes that Kanu will be playing football within six months of surgery.

The intelligence from the medical experts has only added to the speculation surrounding the future of Kanu's career following his surgery in Cleveland, Ohio next month. While it will be some time before the final word, some senior officials have already passed a negative judgment on the Nigerian's future in football. Nwankwo Kanu, however, believes we'll be seeing more of him next season.

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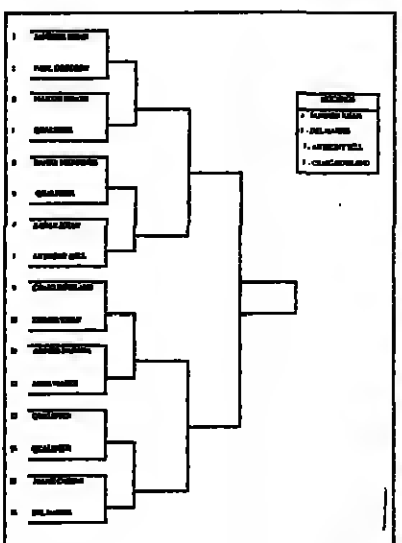
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Under glass

IN A World Squash Professional Association (WSPA) first, the ballot of the main draw of an association sponsored event took place outside its headquarters in Wales. Mohamed El-Menshawi, head organiser of the 4th Heliopolis Squash Open, after petitioning WSPA officials, was given the go ahead to stage the draw in Egypt.

"This will certainly raise publicity for the Heliopolis Open and promote it to the stature of other championships in Egypt such as Al-Ahram, and the Gezira tournaments," commented El-Menshawi.

The tournament got underway last Monday in the portable glass court first erected at the Al-Ahram Squash Open at the Giza Pyramids.

The draw, attended by official WSPA presenter Robert Edward,

contained 16 entries including Egypt's Amir Wagih and Ahmed Barada. The two friendly rivals were dismayed to discover that they will be playing against each other in the first-round of the main draw.

WSPA sponsored judges, John Robinson and Bert Marton will be joined by supervising judge Abdel-Hamid Aref in overseeing the distribution of the \$35,000 prize pool among the top 16 competitors.

Edited by Inas Mazhar



Ahmed Barada facing Amir Wagih for the sixth time in the Heliopolis Open

Sonallah Ibrahim:

Cliffhanging

A life stranger than fiction? Just one deep breath...

In his first, largely autobiographical novel, *Tilk Al-Raiha* (The Smell of It), Sonallah Ibrahim draws a self-portrait. The accessibility of this portrait, however, was largely determined by censorship. Certain "immoral" passages were censored before publication; indeed *The Smell of It* was banned in 1966. The second edition, of 1969, was "expurgated" of phrases and scenes that the political and literary establishment deemed unacceptable. It was to be twenty years before a Moroccan edition made the novel accessible in its entirety.

In *The Smell of It*, as in his later works, Ibrahim deliberately breached political and moral taboos, revealing without shame all the motives and desires society would have him suppress. He addresses the social and political dimensions of Egyptian reality past and present, but from a unique perspective, that of an experience formulated by years of political activism, imprisonment, self-imposed exile and suffering. Merging Freudianism with Marxism, Ibrahim produces his own vision of both — all his "isms", indeed, are homespun.

Ibrahim's political involvement began when he became a member of a leftist organisation. Eluding the police, he devoted himself to underground work in the Delta countryside. After a short hulk, in 1956, he started writing and translating with a brilliant intellectual,

one of the leading figures of the communist movement in Egypt, Shohdi Attiya. The latter had just been released after seven years in prison and had been allowed to establish a small publishing office. But in January 1959 came the crackdown on the left.

Ibrahim and Attiya found themselves constantly on the move from one prison to another — from the Citadel prison to Kharga Oasis prison, from Cairo to Alexandria. There they were given a military trial, then taken to Abu Za'bal prison, where a barbaric reception awaited them. Ibrahim was handcuffed to Attiya. The two men were tortured.

In *The Smell of It*, Ibrahim remembered:

"I was sitting beside him, my head connected to his. We were at the back of the lorry and the other inmates were behind us. He knew what was going to happen, but he did not say anything... When we arrived it was dawn. They drove us out of the lorry with sticks. We sat on the ground. We were shuddering with the cold and fear. He was the tallest one of us. I heard someone say: 'That is him,' and they struck him on the head and said: 'Lower your head, you dog.' They began calling out our names. Then they called his, and that was the last time I saw him."

Ibrahim remained in detention for five years, most of which were spent in Kharga Oasis prison. The inmates included a number of outstanding critics and

writers like Alfred Farag, Salah Hafez, Ibrahim Abdel-Halim, Mahmoud El-Alem, Abdel-Azim Anis and Mohamed Sidqi. Ibrahim was closest to a smaller circle of young writers like Abdel-Hakim Qassim who later achieved recognition with his novel *Ayam Al-Invar Al-Sabaa* (The Seven Days of Mao), Raouf Mostafa who wrote *Baydat Al-Naama* (Ostrich Egg) and Kamel El-Qalish, the author of *Sadmat Ta'ir Gharib* (The Shock of an Alien Bird). The handful of short stories Ibrahim wrote at the time were published after his release, in *Al-Gomhouriya* newspaper.

Ibrahim belonged to a political group that backed Nasser's socialism and nurtured rosy illusions about reality. But in *The Smell of It*, it was to his own living experience that Ibrahim turned. The web of relations he delineates are set against a society beginning to succumb to consumer values: the body of a construction worker who has fallen from a building is left indifferently covered with newspapers, a boy is casually brutally raped in a police station, ties of good-will and mutual support are severed between friends and colleagues. *The Smell of It* is hardly a flower scented whiff of progress and development. It reeks of overflowing sewage, oppression, indifference and decadence.

The integrity of Ibrahim's portraiture in the novel was misunderstood: some took him to be antagonistic to the Nasserite experience and he was identified in

certain critical essays as an enemy of "Nasserite totalitarianism". But Ibrahim has always been free of the idealistic falsifications of reality, although he supported the regime's anti-imperialist drive as well as its pro-Arabism and commitment to social reform. In Ibrahim's view, it is the writer's task to uphold a critical, sceptical stance towards power — be it political, economic or ideological. According to Ibrahim, the writer's role is to search continually for the new, and to remain in perpetual rebellion against all that is obsolete and redundant.

Likewise, there is no trace of heroism in Ibrahim's autobiographical description of imprisonment, torture, his integrity and unyielding commitment to principles. All these aspects of his personality and experience are represented as part of ordinary daily life, an innate way of living and thinking. To him, politics is inseparable from the quotidian, from the subconscious and even. In his subsequent novels *Nigmat Aghustus* (August Star) and *Beirut*, politics is interwoven with the protagonists' consciousness, their vital energy, informing their choice of friends and even their response to women.

Ibrahim's fiction is matter-of-fact about sex, but his treatment of the subject has its own distinctive features. The straightforward descriptions of the body and its functions reflect Ibrahim's disdain of the ecclesiastical view that separates human nature into the soul, fluttering in the upper spheres, versus the body, ruled by disorderly, base passions.

Ibrahim's view embraces human nature in its totality, treating the language of the body with dignity. Beyond new biology, relationships reflect patterns of domination and submission. Sex is read as an expression of the culturally determined difference between men and women. In Ibrahim's fiction, sex is not steeped in sin, nor is the desired woman ever reduced to an object without will or autonomy. The masculine self-image is also intimately related to social relationships and class issues. To Sonallah, then, sex interfaces with politics, and he focuses on this interrelationship.

If Ibrahim's portrayal of sexual acts is rendered with interplay, his courageous breaking of taboos is premised on an understanding that self-knowledge is to be attained through intimate relationships. Ibrahim charts, beyond eroticism, the impulse to break isolation. At no point, however, does he indulge in sentimentality and romanticism — in both sex and politics, he dreams with wide-open eyes. He is explicit but never vulgar; his accounts of experiences that would arouse titans in bourgeois drawing rooms, or outrage among the more ascetic are rendered with sympathy and irony. Masturbation becomes an attempt to embrace illusion, the inability to interact with reality, in sex or politics. In Ibrahim's fiction, the ugliness of political reality, which subjects citizens to the most vicious forms of torture is mirrored in sexual acts or physiological functions generally considered too risqué or too distasteful for print. But Ibrahim sees in the representation of ugliness a certain beauty, and a literary sensibility unlike the dominant one.

Ibrahim's writing has strongly influenced the work of the '90s generation. Iconoclastic like him, they rebel against literary conventions and rhetorical devices, tune in to the concrete details of daily life, glory in the corporeal and sexual and uphold the supremacy of individual experience. But the '90s writers differ from Ibrahim in their total disregard for political and social issues. He follows with interest the output of these writers, not unduly disturbed by the more off-beat texts some of them produce. He says they remind him of the '60s generation in their rebellion against the establishment. "The writers of the '60s," he hastens to add, "far from referring to a school with distinctive features, is an umbrella term for disparate experiments — from Gamal El-Ghitani's novels, inspired by medieval historians, or Mohamed El-Bisatie's fictional world of myth and archetype, to the realism of Youssef El-Qaid."

The '90s writers, on the other hand, have more in common with each other than the desire to create a rupture with the past. In his view, the most promising among them are bound to mature beyond the focus on literary experiments and start posing questions about what they write and whom they address. Through the quotidian they will come to grips with the political, reading on an ice-cream cone the name of the multinational company that presents one of the faces of hegemony. Some of these writers, he asserts, are already starting to walk out of the dead-end street of in-

difference to stand at the edge of the ditch and take a good look.

As for Ibrahim, he has maintained a critical stance toward politics, particularly the variations practiced by the progressive Arab parties which remain abstractions, floating on the surface of daily life. Members of such parties are past masters at reiterating progressive slogans that, however, have no bearing on their relationships at work or at home, with their wives and children, or in their consumer lifestyles. He mentions that some parties often develop into a subsidiary establishment within the regime playing, at best, the role of a pressure group.

Ibrahim has no involvement with any parties or with establishment institutions. Indeed, he has no regular job but leads the lifestyle of a professional writer, working from home and subjected to the usual shortcomings of the publishing industry. But he has achieved literary renown. Many of his novels have been translated into various languages and received much critical acclaim and academic attention abroad.

In addition to writing science fiction for children about oceanography, bumble bees and spiders, he is an accomplished and original translator, his most recent work an anthology of women writers' erotica. Although the positive reception of his writings has brought him much fulfilment, he is aware that his work is often misunderstood. Some foreign readers saw in his novel *Zar* (Self) nothing more than an accomplished satire on contemporary Egypt and Egyptians. Similarly, many Lebanese readers were incensed by his novel *Beirut Beirut* which they read as a personal attack, overlooking the author's criticism of the situation in the Arab world at large.

Although travel has given him much insight and experience, he is always reluctant to leave home. There was his 1968 trip to Lebanon on the deck of a ship; later he was to work at a news agency in Germany; then he studied film in Moscow for three years. He then returned to Egypt where he has lived since 1974 apart from brief trips to attend conferences and cultural symposia. On these trips he is questioned, perhaps too eagerly, about Arabs, Islamist terrorism, and normalisation with Israel. This kind of situation, in his view, is caused by the not-disinterested sponsorship of many cultural events by banks, firms, and political organisations. There are Arab public relation stars, he notes, who act as brokers for these interests.

Looking back, Ibrahim muses about the massive changes that have overtaken the cultural scene. Some thinkers who started out as radicals were assimilated by the establishment, re-emerging as hard-line right-wingers. Shallow commercial notions about the role of writers, intellectuals, and the function of literature have gained currency — it is the culture of petro-dollars. Ibrahim, however, is optimistic about new generations who look inward, delving into their own experience in search of solutions to the current impasse.

He perseveres in his search; he enthuses about the theme of the quest in contemporary fiction. In his own work, he observes, he often draws on the techniques of that most popular of genres, the detective novel: the emphasis on action and breath-taking suspense. He sees the current state of affairs in the Arab region, the Gulf War and the role of Israel as more melodramatic than the most contrived of fiction at cliffhangers — a state of affairs that calls for X-marks-the-spot techniques to cut away the mystery.

Profile by Ibrahim Fathi

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▼ I do love weddings but some of course I love more than others. It has to do with the atmosphere I always say, a feeling of general excitement, the same one felt at one's own wedding — which was not so long ago, regardless of what you may have been led to believe — One such wedding was that of gorgeous Diana to Hosni Mustafa Hossni, at the Cairo Sheraton. Diana's father, Kamel Mostafa is Al-Ahram's deputy managing editor and this is why I felt on such familiar grounds chatting with our Chairman of the Board Ibrahim Naffie and with Ali Ghoneim, general manager of Al-Ahram Organisation. I also spotted actor Said Abdel-Ghani who is among Al-Ahram's renowned art critics, resplendent in his favourite colour, and many of my dear colleagues. It was like a reunion only on a grander scale every one dressed up and congratulating the bride and groom who were beaming with happiness.

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